



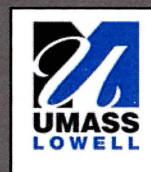
Explorations in Oral History:

Post Second World War Immigrant Voices
Lawrence, Massachusetts

Excerpts from the Lawrence History Center's Oral History Collection prepared by
University of Massachusetts Lowell Honors College student Fabiane Kelley.



*Project funded through the University of Massachusetts Lowell Honors
College and the College of Fine Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
in cooperation with the University's History Department
and the Lawrence History Center.*



Cover image credits:

Left:

Carolina deJesus with children Elizabeth, 21 months, and Kimberly and Katherine, 11 months (p.46)
Eagle-Tribune, October 29, 1995

Top:

Temostocles Devers and Belen Pereyra dress in traditional Dominican costumes at cultural night, 2002
LHC Photo Collection

Right:

Family of Hue Khuu (mother) and Khoan Hua (father)
LHC Photo Collection

Bottom:

Back row: Edward Habeeb, Peter Habeeb; Front row: Robert Habeeb, Judy Habeeb, Rosalie Habeeb (p. 65)
LHC Photo Collection

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<http://www.lawrencehistory.org/student/kelley>

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ESTER APARICIO

Ester Aparicio, an immigrant from Argentina talks about her early life in Argentina, the political situation under Péron and how she became a U.S. citizen. The interview was conducted on January 27, 1997 by Sandra deVita.

Ester let's start by getting your name, address, date and place of birth, please.

My name is Ester Celestina Aparicio. I live at 35 Common St., Apt. 24, (Lawrence, MA). I was born in Argentina on August 11th, 1924.

Where specifically were you born in Argentina?

In Villa Muheta, Provincia de Santa Fe.

Ester, tell me about your life in Argentina.

Well, my life in Argentina was comprised of a lot of work. By the time I was seven years old, I was already employed as a servant. I didn't get to attend school much-- I only went for three years.

Because you had to work?

Because I had to work. All the others (siblings) were younger than me and we had to come up with food.

How many were there in your family?

Fourteen brothers and sisters and half brothers.

What about your parents?

My father left us when we very young. The oldest of us struggled with my mom to raise the rest of the family. I got married very young.

How old were you?

I turned fifteen in August and by September I was married. I was fortunate. My husband was much older than I; he was twenty years my senior. He was an educated man, very kind and helped my family.

So do you think that perhaps you got married out of necessity rather than for love?

No, no. It was love. He was a very good person ... a very good person.

What did he do for a living?

He was an electrician. He worked for affluent families and anything that had to do with electronics. Because there you fixed things-- not like here where if it doesn't run, you throw it out. An iron lasts 20 to 30 years. Things like that are always fixed.

How did you meet your husband?

We were neighbors. He told my mother that although I was very young that he could understand me. So, we got married.

When did you have your first child?

I had my daughter in 1943.

How long were you married before you had your first child?

Four years.

How many children do you have in total?

Three. Two sons and a daughter.

You worked as a servant in Argentina. Did you work at someone's home?

Yes. We tended to the animals, cut the grass, gave the horses water to drink.

You did everything?

Everything.

And did your employers treat you well?

Yes. He was a doctor and she worked for the telephone company. I took care of her kids. All very nice people.

Ester, please tell me about your trip to the United States. How did you end up coming here from Argentina?

My husband had died in Argentina. My daughter had gotten married (by a justice of the peace) but on the 24th she was getting married by the church and I needed to be here.

So she was in the United States?

Yes, my daughter was here.

Who were the first members of your family to come to the United States?

My youngest sister. She brought my daughter and son with her. I arrived after my husband had died. My daughter had gotten married in October in a civil ceremony. December 24th she was due to get married by the church so I arrived in November for the wedding.

So were your plans to come here just for the wedding or did you intend to stay?

No, no. I had a job in Argentina working for the government as a janitor. They gave me six months off but were expecting me to return. After being here for only a month, I landed a job, and I was an illegal (alien).

Where did you get this job?

At Janelle Swiss. Mr. Mauro spoke to me and I couldn't speak English. When my daughter exited an office I told her that he was trying to communicate with me but that I couldn't understand him. He told her that if I wanted to work I could begin that very same day.

Was he the owner of...?

He was the owner of Janelle Swiss.

Was this a factory?

A factory at Union and Essex Streets.

What did they make at the factory?

Shoes.

What did you make of this job offer?

I said "yes" and that same day I filled out the necessary paperwork. I told him I was an illegal (alien) and he said not to worry, things would work out.

What was your job there?

I added shoelaces and rubber and eventually became ---(sounds like "floor lady")

What is that?

The person who delegates the work.

You mean a foreman?

Yes. Unfortunately, the factory closed.

Ester, I presume you are still not an illegal alien?

No, it took me three years to fill out all my papers, and I paid all of my taxes even though I was not here legally. But, when my papers came and summoned me to Canada I made myself legal.

Explain that to me. Why were you going to Canada?

Because I had a choice of either going back to Argentina or going to Canada in order to attain my residency and the airfare to Argentina cost too much. They gave me my residency almost immediately. The gentleman who took down all my information told me I had done well to pay my income taxes and that I had all my paperwork in order. They gave me my permanent residency. Many years later-- in 1980 I became a citizen because this is my country. I came here and I have no plans to leave. My grandchildren and my son are here.

Are you happy here?

Yes, very content. I am very appreciative because by working here, I was able to help my mother a lot and my brothers.

Tell me about your family. You are the...?

I am the second of fourteen. Now there are only thirteen remaining-- one died.

Of all your siblings, are you the only one here in the United States?

Yes, just me. My sister left because her husband did not want to stay. This is the sister who brought me here, that is my son and daughter. She returned to Argentina.

Who remains here?

My immediate family. My children and a niece.

Ester, at what point did you realize that you neither intended nor desired to return to Argentina?

Since the moment my parents passed away.

When was that?

My mother passed away about 20 years ago. I just really liked it here immediately because I saw that the money I made went a long way-- a long way. For my family, for many things.

Did you send money back home?

Yes, money, clothing--- anything that I could and still do.

What was your life like here?

Here, as always, I worked. At first, I lived with my daughter.

When you first got here you lived with your daughter?

Yes, I went to live at my daughter's house in Methuen. After that, her husband worked a shift, I worked the third shift and my daughter worked the second shift. This enabled my daughter to keep her two babies home with us.

You all took turns looking after them?

Yes.

Where was your second job?
At New Balance

In Lawrence?
Yes, crossing over Canal St.

What did you do there?
I applied rubber cement to the soles of the shoes.

How long did you work there?
About five years, I think.

Did you like it there?
I liked it, but they didn't pay me well. All the newcomers got paid more. So, I told them "look I'm going to leave" and they said "no, you won't leave"... "yes, I'm going to leave." Word got out that AT&T was looking for people and I got there at 4:00 am to get into line and they took me.

You were in line to apply for a job?
To apply for a job and they accepted me on the spot.

What did you do there?
At first I worked with the cables.

Computer cables?
No, cables for everything but then I developed heart problems. I had two heart attacks and so I needed a job that required less (physical stress). There they are really concerned about their employees and so they assigned me to a computer where I made labels for cables. There I worked until I developed a problem with one of my hands and couldn't touch the poisons that were in the ink. During my three month recuperation period they had me sit at a desk where you were not allowed to read. I told them that I wanted to become a United States citizen and use the time for studying. They agreed, and so I'd sit there studying-- quizzing myself, erasing my wrong answers, and finally I became a citizen.

So for three months while you recuperated...?
No, no, (the three months) until my retirement at sixty-five.

So, for three months while you waited to retire, you sat at a desk studying for your citizenship exam and they paid you?
They paid me my check and I passed my test.

What year was this?
March 29, 1990.

Ester, please tell me about your trip to the United States.
It was marvelous. I arrived in New York and witnessed my first snowfall in the month of November. It was a very nice trip.

Did you have expectations about what life here would be like?
No, I was confident that I would like it and I did.

What surprised you the most about the United States?

That one could live well with the money you earned-- which for me were a lot-- I used to make \$1.25 an hour. But, for me that was a lot of money.

.....

Ester, are you politically active here or were you in Argentina?

In Argentina I was part of the union opposed to Peron.

Tell me about this.

For many years I worked for the party, at meetings, fund-raisers, elections but not for my own politics but to help the country.

What was life like under Peron?

Well, for those who were against Peron, it was bad. Whole families disappeared. If your mother, father, sister or brother made any anti-Peron rhetoric, it was your obligation to denounce them and have them arrested. And this was not to our liking.

Was anyone in your family personally affected by this?

No, thank god. We did however, have an uncle who was searched. He lived in Villa Muheta (I had since moved to city of Rosario) where he owned a bus stop, cinema and bar. The Peronista police would come in and throw all of his things-- clothes, everything, searching for incriminating evidence. My uncle suffered a lot. He suffered because he had refused to remove a large picture, from the entrance, of (Polito Golla) one of the greatest radical Presidents. So, they had it out for him but, it never went beyond that.

Did you know any families who were affected?

Yes. With my own eyes I witnessed people lined up against a wall and shot for being out and breaking the curfew. They asked no questions, sometimes people simply got out of a movie late. There was a lot of injustice.

Now, there were some good things that came out of Peron. Prior to him, you could work twenty-four hours a day and there would be no pity for the worker. He put a pension and retirement plan legally into place. This was one of the good things he did. I was a government employee, but when Peron's wife died, when you went to cash your check, for example, if you were owed fifty, you'd get ten and told that you had donated the remaining forty into the fund for the creation of the Evita monuments. They didn't care whether or not you had kids to feed, bills to pay-- your check was discounted to the amount that they were willing to give you. This went on for months and monuments were made supposedly in bronze. When Peron fell, we discovered that these monuments were actually made of (gesso dorado) and that they had pocketed all of that money. There were many injustices. They claim to have given things away-- well, they never gave me anything. I probably wouldn't have taken it anyway.

Did living under Peron's rule ever instigate thoughts of moving to the United States?

No.

So, in as much as life may have been difficult under Peron...?

It was difficult for me because I'd answer back, if spoken to; I wouldn't just stay silent. When Mrs. Peron died, they made all the school children wear black and I did not send my daughter to school for a week. Her teacher asked me why I hadn't sent Elena to school. I told her that if I did not wear black to mourn any member of my family then, I certainly would not allow my daughter at her age to do so for someone we didn't even know. For speaking like this, it was the teacher's obligation to denounce you. We were oppressed and not allowed to speak our minds but, I did anyway.

Were you afraid?

No. I had living across from me one of the high ranking police officials. He boasted about placing a hood over his head, so that prisoners he beat could not identify him. I said many ugly things to him but no one ever said anything to me perhaps, because he knew I would know it was him that had denounced me.

This man was your neighbor?

He was my neighbor, and he ended up needing his neighbor. He became paralyzed and it was my children who helped him out by picking up things for him, taking him out or just conversing with him because I never taught my children to hate but rather to love everyone; and never to make fun of someone who is disabled. Whenever we'd see someone disabled, I'd tell me kids "there's a grandparent-- yes, that old man could very well be your grandfather so, treat him well."

Ester, what's your opinion on the state of relationships between men and women? Here in the U.S. and in Argentina? It's been my observation, that within the Latin culture "machismo" exists, and therefore adultery by men has been more commonly accepted, especially by women. What do you think about that?
The man who has another woman wouldn't last with me. The reason men get away with that is because we let them. Adultery is not acceptable for either men or women.

Ester, what is your concept of beauty.

Simplicity. I don't like extravagancies, in the face, in the hair... I do like a person who is well groomed.

.....

As you know Lawrence is a community of Hispanics but, you are a minority, in that you are South American, and they are far and few between here. How have you gotten along with the people from these other races?

Well, I get along with everyone. If someone bums me, I let them walk. If someone treats me badly or speaks ill of me, I ignore them but I let them know what they've done to me, nicely. I've worked quite a bit here at the Senior Center-- I've even served as Vice President, and of the one hundred and ten that I've worked with, only one refuses to acknowledge me.

SAVAN PRUM

Savan Prum, an immigrant from Cambodia, escaped the Khmer Rouge with her two little children. She shares her story about life before her escape, in the refugee camps and her new life in the United States. She was interviewed by Joan Kelley on April 13, 1996.

Can you tell me something about your early background in Cambodia? How you lived and what you did?
When I was young, I live in the farm with my parents. The most thing I did in farm with my parents is growing rice, the crop rice.

Rice mostly, and then did you do any teaching while you were there?
I teach in the Temple for the Great One from 1968 I think, until 1970 and then I left my parents.

OK. Were you married at this time?
Yes I did. I did marry in 1969.

OK. Why did you leave your parents?
Because at that time my husband was a soldier and my parents live on the other part of the Khmer Rouge and my husband couldn't go to live with me because he on the other side and the Khmer Rouge doesn't like the soldier on the other side, and they will find out if I was the wife of the soldier, they will catch me so my father told me to escape from that town to live with my husband so that is why I left my parents.

OK. And where did you move to?
I moved to Phnom Penh, I live in the capital city of Cambodia.

At that time did you have any children?
Yes, my son was born. [He was] four months old when I escaped my parents in the farm to the city, yes.

OK. And after that you had other children?
Yes, until 1973 the second son was born and I lived in Phnom Penh from 1970 to 1975. At the beginning of the 1975, then I went to visit my sister who lived in Ban Keng Phae(?) In April 1975 and at the end of the new year day the Khmer Rouge came in so I lived with my sister, my husband and my two sons, but we couldn't live in the city, when the Khmer Rouge come in they forced the people in the city [to] get out from the city.

So you had to stay with your sister?
Yes, I had to stay with my sister from that time from 1975 until 1979.

Was your husband a soldier at this time?
No, not at that time. He was not a soldier anymore. He was a soldier in 1970 until to 1975, after the Khmer Rouge came in all soldiers or any people working for government have to work in the farm. So no one can work for government, [no one] can be a soldier anymore.

So your husband worked on your sister's farm?
It's not her farm. The farm belongs to the Communists, because the people cannot own any farms. My sister was a teacher too and her husband was a teacher too so they both use to live in the city before the Communists come in.

And they got forced out of the city?

Yes, forced out of the city and live in the farm.

Did you have to work on the farm too?

Of course I had to work on farm, [from] the morning like from the sunrise until the sunset.

And who took care of your children?

They have like the older people to take care of the younger in the village and we all go [to] the rice field to work. The adults and who are stronger. The teenagers too.

OK. It must have been very, very hard?

It was hard.

At that time you had two children?

I had two sons, yes. My first son was five and the second son was two.

Now, will you tell me what happened to your two year old son?

My two year old son the first he start sick he had a diarrhea and they did not have any medicine to give him to stop that and it continuing on and on and they don't have enough food to provide like the aid of the children because he still young, two years old he had to have a nice food to aid but they don't like rice but not enough rice so the food is not enough. The medicine they don't have it, so I could not have any idea to help him get well so he getting worse and worse until he died.

So he died basically of dehydration?

Yes. Yes.

OK. Now, was your daughter born while you were there?

No.

You had moved. How long were you on this farm?

From 1975 until at the beginning of 1979.

OK. And?

About four years.

Now, tell me about your escape from the farm.

At that time it seemed like a thousand of people because they know the Vietnamese troops come in and to push the Communist to go away so we have a chance to escape at that time. Because saw a lot like a thousand people walk on the road, first like to the Thailand border. So I came with them, because I thought I couldn't stay there alone because I was afraid.

Were you the only one who escaped from this farm and joined the group going to Thailand?

The whole village; they escape to join the group.

So you had your son with you?

Yes, I had my son with me and my daughter. I was pregnant; eight months old, nine months old at that time.

You had to walk?

I had to walk

How many days did it take you?

At that time I walk on the farm I don't reach the Thailand town yet. I stay to many place before I come to the Thailand, like the first day that I escaped from that farm I fell down on the road and my daughter, I mean I gave birth to my daughter that night. I think maybe I fell so hard on the road and after I gave birth to my daughter about two weeks or one week I forget, I try to escape more continue.

Then you had to stop after you had given birth?

Yes, I had to stop after I had given birth.

You kept your son with you?

My son with me, my sister with me, my brother-in-law with me.

And your brand new daughter.

Yes...and my brand new daughter.

Were you sick?

I felt like, I think I was sick at that time, but I was afraid the Communists would come and take me back with them so it seemed like I had to be strong, you know? so I forgot about my sickness, it seems like.

And you just kept going. Do you have any idea how many days you were on the road before you got to Thailand?

After I gave birth to my daughter it took about two weeks and then I left that place. I stayed near to bomb city, because before the Communists come they force to live in at the east of the city and I come back I have to go to the west to the Thailand so I go back near the city again, so I live in the city about 4, 5 months and then I have a lot of friends they ask to go to the other place to get, to do something to survive before we came to the Thailand.

Where did you live while you were there in this city?

It call like in the temple it called like I forgot what the name was, "the temple" something like that.

But someone was taking care of you?

No, someone was not taking care of me. We together, we are taking care of each other, the other family they take care of their family and I take care of my family. But we want to be like the community, so we can ask the government to help like to do something on the farm. So the government support us until we get a group that we become a group and they sent us to do like the sugar cane to become sugar, sugar, ye, but about one week the Communist bombing again and we escape from that area again.

And kept on going?

Yes, kept on going come back to the city, come back to...

OK. Was your husband with you at this time?

No, my husband was took away since I was pregnant with my daughter, about eight months so, and about one month later the ... Vietnamese troops forced the Communist away and become escape from that farm.

And your husband was killed?

Was killed, yes. I found out he was killed ... not in front of me but was [killed] somewhere else. So when we were in the group we don't have like any soldier or any part of the troop to guard us for the job in that area and then we don't feel secure because at the day time the Communist bomb that to our factory, we have like a factory to make sugar but they bomb and then we escape again because we didn't feel secure at all because there was no policeman or soldier to guard us. So we left and then our group separate because some people they think we can not go back to do that job. And if I decide do myself I cannot go I

afraid to, so I have to decide like everybody else to separate the group, we have to do our own job, and after that I start to, I have some little gold that I hide from the Communist and I start to change with the rice to buy something, because at that time they use rice to change like a vegetable or fish or meat.

We would call it bartering, I guess. Just exchanging it.

Bartering, just exchanging it. We didn't have any money yet. We still have like a new government and the people who work for the government they still don't arrange nothing like money yet cause in the Communist day they don't have that, like here, money, dollar you know? So we exchange rice with the thing. So at that time I started to exchange the gold with the rice and I exchange for fish and I sell the fish. My nine years old son (1979 at that time) ... he can sell and I can take care [of] my new baby, my daughter at home. We have no home. We have no house at that time. We just live under like they build like the house for the monk, but they destroy everything only the roof cover.

From the bombing?

Yes. From the bombing some part of the roof is destroy[ed], was destroy[ed] but some looks good so I stay under there.

Were the monks there at the time?

No, because most of the monks they force the monks to be like the people so no more monks but in 1979 when the Communist out some part is still controlled but in my area [the Communists are] out. Some people start to become like monk because they want to be like a part of the Buddha religion again, so they start[ed] to form little by little. And now I continue talk about my business. When I buy something for my son to sell, I just sell fish or dry fish or some vegetable or sometime I do like a cake so he can sell. I [ex]change rice but it was not good at all because not much people have thing[s] to [ex]change so it's getting worse and worse and all my money is done. Then I decide to leave my country.

Who was buying this food from you as long as you could do it?

The people who have money.

In the city?

Yes, in the city.

So you decided to leave your country.

Yes. I decide to leave my country. I was telling my sister because my sister don't want me leave her, but at that time I don't live with her but I live about ten miles apart and I decide to leave the country by myself with two children. My son was nine years old at that time my; daughter about 4 or 5 months old and I walk[ed] from that place where I live with friend. At that time was not much people escape because they afraid the soldier would see you, the Vietnamese soldier would see you and they will take you away. So I escape with the few friends. I walk from that place and I go in like the forest some water but not deep water, and on the way we met little by little and I mean the people joined more and more on the place where that we can hide [from the] soldier and I mean far away from soldier. We slept at night about 1 hour because we were so tired we walked from the morning until the sunset until like midnight. We decide to sleep because we thought the soldier will go away at that time at the night. So we decide to sleep about one hour like a group you know like 20 people. And then we walk, we slept about 1 hour and then we continue on but at that night, when we slept some people slept some people had to guard. We don't sleep altogether. And when we continue and continue until we reach the...

In Thailand?

In Thailand ... In the forest it's hard to find food. Most of the people they did not bring any food with them because its a long long ways to walk, so especially they didn't have it, they didn't have anything, they didn't have money to buy food so they came with them nothing with them and

I had some like potato I already boil and I put in like a bag and some dry meat already cook for my son and my daughter. But the water is so awful we don't have any clear water to drink, no well water only the water in like the dirty water on like the pond, the duck, the cow or the pig go in there and... but the people have no choice because they are so thirsty and they

So they have to drink this dirty water?

Yes, they have to drink that dirty water. They just put the clothes and pour the water on the clothes so they can drink it little bit better ... and the people was getting sick about that water and die. And it's awful on the way where I escape because a lot of dangers, the bomb, the soldiers, rape, so we didn't have any secure at all. We walk and walk most of them have no food. We walk until we reach a city, still in Cambodia, near to the Thailand border. Yes, at the evening about 6 o'clock I got there and I met one of the old man and he said I can live there for awhile near to him but I decide to stay there. He thought I was so tired, so he held like a tent in the refugee camp. He thought ok you can stay near to me but don't sleep there, but I decide even when he said don't sleep there I decide there, because I have nobody to know no friends so I don't know where to go and I already decide to stay there. But he still "don't stay here" because here a lot of gambling. When we live near to the Thailand, people ... they make business and they have money and play gamble.

Gamble?

Yes, they gamble and the bomb from I think that bomb from the Vietnamese soldier they want to bomb and I don't know who want to but they already bomb to the refugee. They bomb in that place that the way he told me that old man told me and I already decide to stay, because I don't know where to go, and he keep saying you don't stay here because you have young children and Oh my God where do I go? I have no friends and then I decide to go somewhere I keep my youngest and my son I mean my two children with him and....I will look around and I walk further to find some place and I couldn't find any. Yet a few hours later I met one of my friend and then I told her my situation and she took me to her house, I mean it's not a house like a tent...

This is all in the refugee camp?

Yes, in the refugee camp. It's near the Thailand border and she say "OK, sleep here sleep with me" I sleep with my daughter. Then I come back to my son and daughter to tell that the old man "I thank you so much, you telling me about the place not good so I'm leaving to stay with my friend" and he say "that's good." Then on that first night I slept in my friend's house. Back on the place that I decide to stay the bomb coming on that night was killing a lot of people about 6 people was died on that night.

So the man was right?

Yes the man was right. Then I was so glad that I left from that place that the man told me not to stay. I stay in that refugee camp about I think, 2 months. I start my new business again with doing something for my son to sell. I change with the rice and about 2 months they had like the bus from the Red Cross or from the U.N. bus. Stop in the Thailand near to the Cambodia border. I live in hear. So the bus come; a lot of bus come to take the people from the refugee [camp] because they know the people in that Cambodia[n] refugee [camp] is not safe at all because they steal like have rape, no secure at all nobody care and bombing.

Who was running this refugee camp that you were at?

At that time... I don't know, I don't know, to find a way to survive. I don't know the man, they have it but they don't care they just let the people gamble and do what they want. So when I come to the [camp] because at that time the people in the refugee camp about 2 months one of the leader of the group ask me to volunteer to bring the rice from the Thailand border to the Cambodia border for the people so they can get food. I decide to help them so when I got to the Thailand border I saw a lot of bus they say that U.N. sends them to pick up Cambodian refugees to the Thailand camp. I ask the people near to the bus or bus

driver and they say you can go if you decide [you] want to go you go and I ask them for the fee and they say no they say no I don't have to pay a fee if I want to go I go free. And then I come back, I help them bring rice about few trips that short trip to the Cambodia camp. Then I decide to leave. I brought my son and my daughter but I still don't feel like a hundred percent secure because it seemed to me like I have some of that thinking about the communist I still stay around and come to bother the people and maybe they take the bus and take the people away and kill but I still I have to decide to leave the refugee camp because the refugee camp is in Cambodia border; it is not safe at all. The bombs come in every day, gamble, everything is going on over the camp by the people and I have to decide to leave but when I go on the bus I pray on the bus if my life is good I will have a chance to live again and I got on the bus for about few hours I saw the big tent of the Red Cross and it made me so happy because hope I will survive again.

And how long were you in the Thailand refugee camp?

I reach there at the end of 1979 and I leave in 1981... about 2 years.

.....

Tell me what it was like in this camp?

In the camp they build a long tent for the (like a tent) family to live together and they support the food for the refugees, like rice or some fish can, fish put in the can or some meat that they give to the people like -- wheat, and they give like the coal to cook the food and the water, the water they brought like a tank a big tank because they have no well in the refugee camp and so we had to carry the water too, so and they, everything had to be divided [in e]quality for the people. Food is not so bad, it just not like here, you have a lot of things but over there in refugee just a very little but we survive.

Did you feel as though your children had enough to eat in the refugee camp?

Mostly yes, but some days I didn't because I could not find anything. They don't let us sell things in the refugee [camp].

So you just had to have what was provided to you?

Yes, what was provided.

And they give you clothes?

Yes, they gave... but not enough. No, not enough clothes. They have school, I start[ed] to teach in the refugee camp.

You started to teach in the refugee camp? Oh!

So I teach there.

What did you teach?

I teach grade one in the Cambodian language. So I teach there almost 2 years. So I have to leave so I can get out to the U.S.

OK, and you had to have a sponsor to come to the U.S.?

Yes. Before I came I applied for the sponsor. Then after I applied, about three months later, I have list on the post in front of the office and then go out to live from the refugee camp to the people in 1981. I don't remember the month; I think the middle of the year. Then I live in the Philippines for almost one year because I had to stay there to study about the culture in the U.S.

So they kept you, they didn't bring you right from the refugee camp to U.S.? You had to stay kind of a half way point.

Yes. I had to stay to learn about the culture and they check up about the x-ray your health, background and interview again.

Alright now. You were telling me before that your husband was also in the same refugee camp?

Yes, my husband Pan. We live the same refugee [camp] in the Philippines camp, that camp they divide like a section 1, Section 2. I live in Section 3 he lived in Section 2 which [were] next to each other, but we didn't know each other.

And you were living there at the same time?

The same. He came before me. He came before, about, I think, a few months, but he didn't have any sponsor. So at that time I don't have [a] sponsor too, so I left from the Thailand, I just have because they know I was the wife of the soldier so they took me away from there ..

I see.

And to come to the Philippines to learn the culture, and then they will find the sponsor for me in Philippines. We had the same sponsor; we didn't know. We got on the bus, one of my friends who was best friend, we use to go to school together in the Cambodia and in refugee camp take study like culture in U.S. She told me that she know one man going to come to the U.S. She told me "Savan, I know him be go[ing] to the U.S.; the same city but I don't know; maybe different sponsors." She introduce me when she come to the bus to help me to bring things to the bus and said "he [is the]one going to that state too." And she told him (my husband Pan) "[This is] Savan, my friend, she going to that city too", "And you going to bus to Boston, too?" Because we know only [that we were going to] Boston, Massachusetts. And he says "Yes", and he just walks away. He walks away. I don't pay any attention at all, because I [was] looking [for] my name, listening to get in the bus, because they have to call the name to get in the bus and when we get to the bus, we get the same bus we have the seat near each other. And I just worry on the bus; I didn't talk with him yet. I just introduce my name and told him where to go and I keep worrying "Oh my God, I'm going out to another big country; my English is still very poor because I learn in the refugee camp." I don't know much and my pronunciation is, was terrible, still [is] now. I keep thinking by myself in the bus and then he ask me, Pan ask[s] me "Do you have any relative in the U.S.?" I say no, I don't have it so I worry now because I don't know if the sponsor can speak Cambodian so I understand. I worry about my two small children and he says "Oh don't worry. I don't have any relative too, so if we live in the same city we can have each other". He said like that, and I don't talk much and he doesn't talk much. We just seating on the bus. He getting worried about me worrying.

Was he alone?

He [was] alone, yes. He's alone. He says don't worry we will [have] each other and when we come here we just know when we [get] here [that] we have the same sponsor. We didn't look at the paper we have the same sponsor when we got on the bus. We thought we had different sponsor[s].

Who was your sponsor?

James, I forgot his last name, his first name is James.

So it was a family that sponsored you?

Yes, Yes, Cambodian. He's Cambodian.

So you came to Boston?

Yes, I came to Boston. When I got off the plane there only one sponsor and he said you both are from Philippine, Malaysia, I mean Manila and we say yes, call his name my husband['s] name and he say "I'm your sponsor" and he shake his hand and he say he that he sponsor both of us and he rent apartment for us

to live, the same floor, the same you know apartment, yet different room. Like we share the apartment, roommate.

This man sponsored four of you, you and your 2 children?

My two children, my husband and I.

And that's all?

Yes, that's all. That same night but like a tomorrow night one more family coming, the same apartment to live with my husband.

Different room?

Yes, different room. We have like two bedrooms, one living room and one kitchen. That's all. So I live on the other, small bedroom and one family have husband and wife, son live on the larger bedroom. And Pan live [in the] living room, on the couch.

OK. And you all ate together?

We ate, cook together about a few days. And then the family they decide to cook by themselves, but Pan still decide to cook with me because he said he have no son or daughter or wife to cook for him so he have me and him. Then we decide to go to school at this time.

Now you were on welfare when you were in Boston for a little while?

Yes. Yes.

Was Pan a teacher?

In Cambodia

Yes, he was a teacher but he teach soldier for combat.

Alright, so you decided to go to school?

Yes, and he decide to go to school too. He said ain't hard he know more English than me. He learn he gave me the idea. If I can go to school at night or I can go to school in the morning he will look after my children. Like we take a chance, but at that time he went to school full time and I went part time we still friend.

You went to Bunker Hill Community College, where did he go?

First I went to where my sponsor was, like International Institute in Commonwealth. My husband went to Bunker Hill Community College. I went at night to International Institute where my sponsor was. I kept because my English still little I continue for a year and after like 2 terms my teacher test me and she know I get a good and she refer me to college and she brought me there to show everything and then I decide to register since that time.

And did you train to be a teacher, what did you train for?

At that school I kept continue study and then enter into the Electronic Program for 2 years.

Did Pan work at this time?

He work at school too. He do and then he find a part time job delivery doughnuts.

Good American food. And you are going to tell me how you came to the Lawrence area and when did you get married. When did you decide to get married?

After I graduate I apply for a job and got like an Electronic job in Mayco and a few days later I saw, I got because I bought a newspaper to find a better job. So I saw they need the teacher in Lawrence, need like a tutor teacher and then I applied and they call me to interview right away and then they decide to hire you.

And that was when?

In 1986. I start so from then when I got the job I decide to leave another job in Mayco Electronic and I decide to leave my town in Somerville. So I left Somerville to Lawrence in 1986.

Did you go right to work at the Wetherbee School?

In 1986 I work at the Leonard School, near to the General Hospital [for] about one year and then the school so crowd and the principal move me to the Kane School now is South Lawrence.

It's a new school?

The new school. I work Kane School, in 1987 to 1992, yes in 1991 - 1992 work both Kane School and High School, and then I move to Wetherbee School in 1993 after I got my Bachelor Degree.

Where did you get your Bachelor's Degree?

At Franklin Pierce College, in New Hampshire.

And when did you get married to Pan?

Oh I got married with him because he still, thinking he worry about me because I have no relative. I have two children who are very young and he wants to help me

.....

So he moved to Lawrence. Was that before or after you moved to Lawrence?

After, after I move in about September and married in November.

And did he start to work in this area or did he have to go back to the Boston area?

No at that time he got job in Lowell to the same time I got job in Lawrence. He got job as a teacher in Lowell too, same years.

And he continued to go to school too?

Yes, he continued to go to school in Wentworth in Boston, on Saturday, part time. At that time I stop for awhile; I didn't go to school until 1979. I decide to go back to Franklin Pierce College.

And he is still taking care of you?

Yes, after we get married we have good marriage.

You decided to buy a house in Methuen?

Yes, I bought one house in Lawrence too, but the tenant didn't pay the rent and we decide to give up. We, I bought one house in Lawrence in Butler Street in 1987 and we decide to give up in 1991, 1992... three years ago... because they don't pay the rent and I bought in 1979; houses were so expensive - \$145,000 - and the house [prices] go down and they refuse to pay the rent, more like before until they don't pay so I decide to give up. I couldn't support anymore.

You just gave up the house?

Yes, I couldn't support it more than \$1, 000 a month because I bought this house in 1990 and it [was]so expensive too, so it seem like about almost \$3,000 a month for this house and that house, so I couldn't...

And now you are just keeping a mortgage on this house?

Yes, on this house.

Have you liked living in this area?

I do, yes. I do like it here.

And you do feel safe?

Yes, I feel safe.

And you have certainly enough food?

Yes.

.....

Have you been back over to visit?

Cambodia? Yes, I do. I did. I mean in 1993 I went to visit my parent[s]. They both alive and they are not so healthy because they are old now and my sister, brother. I lost two, three brothers.

In the fighting?

Yes in the communists. Yes, now I have two sisters and three brothers in Cambodia.

And you will go back again?

Yes I like to visit but not to live. My parents want me to visit them. They said just visit don't come and live until the country is safe.

Is it safe now?

No. The people over there they feel OK, but I'm not OK at all. I don't feel safe.

Do you feel pretty safe in living in this country?

I do. Yes, I do.

And your husband, does he feel safe also?

Yes, my husband seem like he want to go back when he retire because it seem so cold here and he have a lot of friends, warm over there and he like the weather.

And it's too cold here?

Too cold here.

DALIA DIAZ

Dalia Diaz originally from Cuba came to United States in 1963. She shares her struggles right after her arrival and her path to success as a writer, entertainer and currently editor of Rumbo, the bilingual newspaper of the Merrimack Valley. Sandra DeVita interviewed Dalia on February 20, 1997.

Dalia can you give me your full name, birth date and location of birth?
Before or after citizenship?

Before?

It was Dalia Satumina Diaz Diaz. My mother and father had the same last name, and as you know we use two last name s in Latin America, first the father's and then the mother's, so as a result I was Dalia Satumina Diaz Diaz.

That's a mouthful.
Yes.

And Diaz is spelled "DIAZ"?

Uh, huh. It's the most common name in Latin America. And, if you go any place (in Latin America); you're going to see pages and pages in the telephone book filled with Diaz. And I have it twice. Lucky me. But, when I became a citizen, I took it off.

You took...?

My middle name and I just became Dalia Diaz-- plain and simple.

And what is your birth date?
November 29, 1946.

And you were born, where?
In Havana, Cuba.

Dalia, can you tell me how you came to this country? The date and reasons behind your coming to this country originally?

I always enjoyed American music in Cuba when I was growing up. My dream was eventually, some day to come to the United States. I always wanted to get an education, and I wanted to learn English. It was a fantasy of mine when I was growing up. Then Castro took over-- the revolution took over in Cuba in 1959 and immediately, some of my relatives who left the country started doing the paperwork so that we could leave. It wasn't until 1963 that we were able to leave the country, February 12, 1963. But, by that time relations between Cuba and the United States had broken off and we had to escape on a boat. My step-father was a fisherman in a co-op and he managed to steal the boat in which we finally left on. There were forty-four of us: thirteen men, fourteen women and seventeen children and we managed to leave one night. For the longest time-- I don't know if it was ever broken, we had the record in Miami for (fitting) the most people in the smallest craft. It was only twenty-seven feet long-- it was just a nutshell-- no cabin-- nothing, just a fishing boat.

Can you tell me about that voyage and about the preparations for that?

We left Cuba a little before two o'clock in the morning on February the 10th, and we spent the whole day in the Atlantic-- the Gulf of Mexico. But, by mid-morning something broke in the water pump or

something in the engine, I don't know exactly what it was and the boat was drifting into the Atlantic. Later that afternoon, we were rescued by the HESS diesel, a big American tanker, a 30,000 tanker, a huge one, and they brought us to the Miami coastline where coastguards picked us up little by little and transported the whole group to Miami. We arrived a little past midnight which made it February 12th, but we actually spent a little over twenty-four hours in the water so, it wasn't the best. It was bad because it was very uncomfortable; we couldn't fit. I had to stay in the same position, with my heels stuck to my buttocks sitting on the floor of the boat with my chin resting on my knees. After so many hours I couldn't even stretch my legs. And, at the beginning when I started throwing-up, I would throw-up over the water because I was sitting at the edge, after a while, I didn't even have the strength anymore, and we would vomit right on our clothes. We had to spend three days with the same clothes, until we went through immigration and they processed all the paper work that they needed and then they gave us new clothing and a shower.

Who from your family was with you as you were going through this?

My mother, my step-father, and my two sisters. There was also, one uncle with his wife and two daughters, and the rest were people that I did not know. Relatives of the other fisherman who used to go out with my step-father. When we spread the word amongst our friends and relatives, that we were leaving, people kept asking to join in the voyage, and eventually it grew to be forty-four, which was a lot more than the boat could carry.

Once you got to Miami-- what then?

Well, the Cuban Refugee Center gave us one hundred dollars a month and we were paying eighty seven (dollars) for rent, so that left us thirteen dollars a month for everything else, for a family of five. My mother and step-father went to work in the tomato plantations in Homestead but, people were greatly exploited at that time in 1963. The minimum wage was one dollar and twenty five cents an hour and yet they had to work-- twelve to fourteen hour days at an average of seventy to seventy five cents an hour. The owners of the plantations fixed the time card to fit eight hours for that money, but in reality they made eight hours worth of salary in twelve to fourteen hours worth of work. They couldn't complain, they couldn't go anywhere because Miami wasn't what it is today. There were no industries, factories, banks. It was just plantations and people had to leave Miami. The Cuban refugee center was going crazy at the time, trying to get rid of us, sending us anywhere -- a one-way ticket anywhere in the country. Three months later my step-father left and he came to Boston and my mother didn't want to come because she was afraid of the cold weather, but the week after he arrived in Boston, he wrote a letter saying that he was making a dollar sixty an hour in a factory in Chelsea, and that in two weeks after he finished the training process he would be making-- watch this-- two dollars and two cents an hour. We thought we were going to get rich! So, at that point my mother said: "I think I'll put up with the winter." We came-- I was only sixteen years old and I went to work at what is today the Marriott Hotel on Atlantic Avenue near the Aquarium. At that time, that was all fishing piers and dingy little houses and warehouses and the boats used to come in that area and unload the fish. I went to work there shelling shrimp. That was my first job.

And you were sixteen?

Sixteen. Ice water up to my knees shelling shrimp. My mother and I went to work there, right where the aquarium is located today.

How old were you when you first came over from Cuba?

Sixteen.

So this all happened with in a year? You're arriving in Miami...

We arrived in Miami in February, and May 19th we arrived here in Boston, Chelsea, and I immediately went to work at the fishing pier, shelling shrimp. I didn't last there very long because working in the ice

water was horrendous, and I got sick. Then I went to work in Cambridge at a factory, stitching because I had learned how to sew in Cuba. All girls in Cuba had to learn to sew and to do embroidery. So I went to work in a factory in Cambridge and I worked there for a few months. In September of '63, that same year, I applied for a job at the American Built Right in Chelsea, at the same company where my step-father was working. Since he was making such good money, I wanted to make good money too. One of the requirements was that people had to be able to communicate in order to get a job. From May through September, I learned enough English to communicate and pass the interview, and I got the job. I was there for a couple of years.

What was the position that you filled?

Just packing rubber soles and heels. My step-father was the presser, making the soles and heels at the big presses (where it was) about a thousand degrees temperature. Then I was in the packing department.

So you were there for a couple of years. What was the next step after that?

I continued from one factory to another.

You were obviously not going to school at the time.

No, and that was my dream, to get an education, and I didn't. At that time, remember, there was no welfare in this country, or at least not the welfare that we have grown to know. We had no right to collect anything, besides that, we didn't even think of it, we just came here to make money-- to work-- to get a decent life. At the time, the Cuban Refugee Center, here in Boston, had an office in Brookline. They had a shelter and we stayed there for a couple of weeks. When we arrived, they (Cuban Refugee Center) rented an apartment through Catholic Charities. They rented an apartment in Chelsea, and we went to live there, but the apartment was empty. It's funny, because now people do a lot of recycling, yard sales and garage sales, and at that time, that wasn't done. People used to put furniture, clothing, dishes and pots and pans in boxes, neatly stacked next to the trash because they knew that someone was going to come around and pick them up. So we got to know the entire truck route in the entire city and we used to beat the trash truck and go around picking up whatever we could. Within a few weeks we had all kinds of furniture, everything in the kitchen. At the beginning we had a few pots, pans and dishes we had brought from Miami, but no furniture. Eventually, we had everything around the house, from rugs to curtains, but in the meantime we also had to work and provide for the rent and food. Eventually, I got married and my English improved and I was able to get better jobs. I had learned typing in Cuba so eventually I went to work in a furniture store as a secretary, and my typing helped to get (me) that job. It was a long succession of factory jobs until I managed to get little better jobs and more money, better salaries, and more recognition and a lot of hard work in between.

You did it the hard way. You mentioned getting married. How old were you when you first got married?

I was twenty. I was twenty-one when my son was born, and twenty-four when my daughter was born. And, it wasn't until after my daughter was born that I started taking courses at Bunker Hill Community College in Charlestown. I always wanted to do that. I always wanted to go to school. Little by little, I continued taking courses through the years, trying to improve myself.

I'd like to bring you back to your first husband, and how you met him.

We were working in the same factory in Chelsea building fluorescent lights.

Can you tell me a little bit about him?

He was a nice guy, a very nice person. We're still good friends. He was a great father.

Was he Cuban or Hispanic?

No, he was French descendent. I never wanted to date Cuban men-- no Hispanic men. They carry machismo to an extreme and I had a preconceived, prejudiced idea that I didn't want to date a Hispanic

man; and I didn't. I wanted to learn English and mingle with American society immediately; and I did. I married a French descendent.

These notions that you had about the Hispanic men-- they must have been formed early... in Cuba?
Yes.

What are Cuban men like in Cuba?

(Laugh, laugh) I hate to generalize, because obviously, I'm wrong (referring to present husband who is a first generation Cuban)! But I grew up with the idea that Cuban men are domineering and philanderers, so I wanted to avoid headaches. Eventually, I found out that it's not so. People are the same wherever you go, and there are all types of men wherever you go.

You mentioned going back to school after your daughter was born. What did you sign up for in school?
I started taking Sociology and Psychology courses. I have always been fascinated by that. I also took some writing courses because writing has always been my passion since I was eleven in Cuba; I started writing poetry and short stories. Deep in my heart I consider myself a writer-- I always did.

Tell me about how it felt for you, your first day in the classroom at Bunker Hill College?

Oh, I was thrilled! I was thrilled. It was a big dream come true, finally to be able to go to school. I was a good kid in Cuba; I was a good student, not a brilliant student-- I was not a straight A student by any means, but sometimes you can judge things that way. I was a good student because I enjoyed being in the classroom. Even today, I enjoy the learning process, sitting in a classroom and learning something new; picking up a newspaper and being able to recognize that "wow, I just learned something today." That discovery for me is the greatest feeling. Being in the classroom I knew that it was only the beginning to big accomplishments-- personal accomplishments.

Were you going to school at night or during the day?

No, no, I was working. I always worked. Even though I had my kids, I always worked and I was going in the evening.

Did you continue to take courses there?

Yes, little by little, through the years, on and off, I continued taking courses. In 1975, I published a book with two novels. The way I put it is, "I became immortalized in the Library of Congress."

Why is that?

Because once you publish a book, your name is always there.

Tell me about the novels.

I started to write the first one when I first came here and I couldn't speak English. There was no TV, radio; so for entertainment...

(You had) no TV or radio in Spanish?

In my house.

Oooh, (none) at all?

(Laugh, laugh) We didn't have TV or radio in my house. Remember, we were poor. So for entertainment purposes, I started writing. It was like going into a world of my own. I created my own fantasy and I wrote one of the stories. I put it aside-- I always dreamt that someday I would publish a book. Eventually, after my daughter was born, I wrote the second one. And you can actually tell how my mind had evolved from one story to the next. When I had them published, since they were both short stories, I published them together in the same book.

What were the stories about?

Mushy, mushy romance. Very romantic, innocent types of stories.

And, they were obviously written in Spanish?

Yes.

What was the catalyst behind getting them published? A lot of time had elapsed between the writing of one and then the other, so what was it that made you decide that you wanted to get them published?

I always did, and I started calling publishers. I could wallpaper a room with the rejection letters I got. It wasn't easy but, one day somebody said, "I'll take it," and it worked. I didn't care if it sold. I didn't care what critiques I got, it was done.

You got your book published?

I got my book published.

That must have felt wonderful?

One of my greatest accomplishments.

Did that open doors for you?

It did. It actually did. Not only because it still looks good on my resume, but it opened the doors to a television career. When I started doing television interviews promoting the book, I got a taste of television and I said, "Hmmm, so this is what it's all about, huh?"

And you liked it?

I think I like television! My mother got very mad at me because my mother was the traditional housewife, who is content with just watching the family grow. She thought that I should be like her, and that if I had two kids to care for, why should I be that ambitious to want to publish a book, and once the book was published, why would I want a career in television? There was nothing wrong in that, I felt. So, from the TV interviews promoting the book, I got the idea for a TV show and I wrote a letter to several TV stations. They each turned me down but Channel 56 one day called me for an interview and they bought the idea, and I stayed with them for fifteen years.

Dalia what was the concept of your proposal to Channel 56?

To produce a Spanish language show for a half hour. I had a clear idea of what I would like to see. I had no experience in television, except for the interviews promoting the book.

You had experience as an interviewee but not as an interviewer.

I had never done that and I had no idea how to put together a show but, I used common sense. They thought that my proposal was sensible enough and that gave me the opportunity to do a monthly show. For the rest of that year-- I started in March of '77-- for the rest of the year I did a monthly show. My August program was only the fifth show that I did, and it was nominated for an Emmy Award. In December I won the Emmy, which is the highest award that the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences gives out.

How did that feel?

I didn't appreciate it because I had no idea what an Emmy was. This happens when things come too soon; when you're not prepared; when you haven't fought for them. It came to me...

It came too easy.

It did. Then I spent the rest of the fifteen years fighting to get another one, and I never did. But, after I won the Emmy, they gave me a weekly show and we changed the name. Instead of "People Power" it became "De Todo Un Poco" which means "A Little Bit of Everything."

Tell me about that program.

It was a public affairs presentation. I had to deal with the problems in the community and how to overcome them. But, I quickly realized that people don't want to hear about Food Stamps, Welfare and educational opportunities; people wanted to be entertained so, I started mixing show segments. We also know about people's attention span, and (how) you can't talk to them for a half hour about a serious problem because they shut off the TV. So, I started dividing the show into three or four short segments, always ending with entertainment; something pleasant: a cooking show, cooking recipes, consumer information, and that would tie (over?) people, so that I could fulfill my obligation to deal with the public affairs aspect of the show while they waited for the entertainment portion at the end, and the show was quite successful.

Did you enjoy doing it?

It was thrilling. Every week...well, I told you I was a nut about the learning process, and every week it was something new that I was learning about. Another thing (was that) I had to educate myself before every interview in order to ask intelligent questions.

So it was an education in itself.

Every single week. New people that I met, new things that I talked about, whether it was politics or social services or consumer information, it was always a learning process for me.

Tell me about one of your favorite interviews, favorite shows and why?

Oh, my god, there were so many. I love to do travel logs-- wherever I traveled; I brought the camera along and then presented it on TV. Because travel shows were not only entertaining but educational (as well). Wherever I travel, I don't just sit on a beach for a week. When I went to Hawaii, I went to Waikiki Beach for twenty minutes. That was all, out of two weeks that I was there. I haven't been to Cancun because I'm not interested in beaches, even though I do like them. I went to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico and never went to the water.

What did you do?

I went to every museum I could find! I spent two solid days in Hilo, Hawaii, in the library. From nine o'clock in the morning until five o'clock when they closed, just doing research on Hawaiian history. That's my thing-- I loved it! I came back and used all that information on the show. So these are probably my favorite shows. I have met a lot of interesting people and done a lot of very sentimental shows. I interviewed a couple who came with their little one year old boy, who was waiting for someone to donate a liver. Their son was dying and eventually he did. These are things that you don't forget.

That must have been very difficult?

Uh, huh.

Who, would you say was the most interesting person that you ever interviewed?

Dona Felica Rincon de Gautier.

Who was that?

She was mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico for twenty-six years. When I went to Puerto Rico, I had the opportunity to interview her when she was ninety-four years old. She died two years later. She was a remarkable woman-- she was (considered) a saint in Puerto Rico. She did a lot for her people and she made an impact on American life. For example, she was the one who originated the Head Start program.

The program started with her. President Kennedy sent someone from his administration to San Juan (she had done a lot of campaigning for him-- she was a staunch Democrat) to see how she was running those schools, and they implemented them into this country. She did a lot with medical care and restoring the city.

Dalia, I'd like to go back to your childhood in Cuba.
Yeeees?

Can you tell me about that, and go back as far as you can? Tell me about your parents, family, where you grew up, and what it was like.

I was born in Havana, but then I grew up, until I was nine years old in El Cotorro. It's a little town about a half hour by bus from Havana-- then we moved back to Havana. Throughout my childhood, we were dirt poor--very, very poor. My mother used to do laundry for other people at home. It was the only skill that she knew how to use. Maybe that's where I get the bad impression of Cuban husband's, because my father worked for a bus company for thirty-three years and eventually he retired from that company. He always had a lot of women around, and he made good money, but in the meantime, he had the whole family living in poverty. My mother had to support three daughters, doing laundry, cleaning houses and menial work like that, even though my father was living with us.

What was he doing with his money? Was he squandering it on other women?

Other women, restaurants ... very often we went to bed with the equivalent of a hamburger which is a Cuban "frita", but the "frita" is a lot smaller than a hamburger. We went without many times while we could see him walking out of a restaurant. Then, when I was fourteen in 1961, I'd finished ninth grade and since I was not enrolled in any government organization like "Pioneers" or "Young Women for Communism" or whatever organizations there were.

At this point, Castro has taken over in 1959, so you've experienced the change of hands in the government?

Definitely, I lived through it. And, in 1961 when I finished ninth grade, I had every intention of going back to school and continuing my education, but I couldn't because I was not involved in any of those organizations, and if you were not, you could not go to school. So I spent the next two years learning how to sew, embroidery, typing and things like that, at home or with private teachers, until I was able to come to this country. Again, with the hope of going back to school when I got here.

Why didn't you belong to one of those (communist government) organizations?

Because, from the very beginning, we wanted to get out of the country.

So you never wanted to support Castro or his government?

No. I tried teaching three people in the neighborhood to read and write from home, when there was a literacy campaign all over the country to teach everyone to read and write. They were sending girls from Havana into the mountains and my mother refused to allow me to do that. Again, because young girls simply wouldn't do that. To compensate, I figured I would teach three neighbors to read and write at home, as part of my contribution for the revolution. But, it wasn't good enough; I was not allowed to enter any school after ninth grade, for that reason.

So, learning to sew and embroider, was that done...?

By private teachers.

Did you have to pay them?

Yes, yes, but it was a way to keep me busy anyway, and learn valuable skills. While I was there for those two years I was able to earn some money sewing. Even today I can do a lot: I can design and make my own patterns, so it's a skill that's always useful to have.

Always comes in handy...

Yes, especially the typing.

So you did that for a couple of years-- in an apprentice-like role using your skills...

Until we were able to leave in 1963.

And how was it that you came about being able to leave the country? Did you (originally) have to petition the government...?

No, no, we escaped. We risked our lives. We escaped in the middle of the night. Actually, that night we heard some shooting, and when we got to Miami we found out that the same night, just a few miles down the coast, but the sea carried the sound of the shooting, they killed, something like twelve people who were trying to leave that night.

O.K., I guess what I'm trying to get a better understanding of is whether or not there is ever the possibility of leaving the country legitimately-- can you petition for that?

Yes, my mother's uncle, through Catholic charities in Miami, since 1959 when he left, he was doing that. We were doing the paperwork-- I got my passport, my whole family did, and we had the visas. But, in 1960 the United States and Cuba broke relations, and no one could leave. The only hope was through a third country, and we didn't know anybody at the time who could petition for us from a third country. We were stuck.

Your only option at that point was to...?

Escape.

Do you remember talking about that with your family? Making the plans...?

Oh yeah.

Can you tell me about that?

My step-father had a lot of confidence in me, and he knew that I wasn't going to say anything, because I was more eager than my mother to leave. I knew all the planning that was going on. The only thing we didn't know was which night it was going to be. I remember that weekend we were in Bacuranao, a beach that we used to go to for years, every Saturday and Sunday. I was there with my aunt and her daughter, my cousin, spending the day, when I saw my mother approaching, dressed in the dress that she had reserved for that night. She was carrying a bag and in it was the dress-- the green and black dress I was supposed to wear that night. So I knew that "tonight's the night." Sure enough we got dressed and went to another point away from the city, away from where we were, and just pretended that we were having a day at the beach. When the night fell, we went under the trees-- the long line of trees along the coastline, "ubascaletas" is what they called them. We hid there until about one thirty-- two o'clock in the morning and then we finally left. My uncle and step-father were watching the coastline since October and this was February when we left. Since October, watching the patrol boats-- what time was it going one way and returning, in order to time the proper time for the escape. I remember all that distinctly.

It sounds like your step-father had a lot of confidence and trust in you.

Oh, yes, we always had a wonderful relationship-- to this day. He is in Florida with my mother. My whole family was here, and little by little, they trickled down to Florida, even my son. My kids used to spend summers in Florida and my son always said, "When I turn eighteen, I'm moving to Florida," and he did. The day he turned eighteen, he got in his car and left.

What do you think the lure or attraction is for a lot of Cubans to go to Florida?

What I miss the most-- the sun! I love New England, and I will not move to Florida because I don't like the heat but, I miss the sun. I hate gray days. I can take one-- I can find one gray day romantic, but when we spend weeks in the winter that we barely see the sun, I get very depressed. I like the sunshine.

That must be something that you miss about Cuba as well?

Definitely.

When you first came to this country, what was the thing that amazed you the most?

The freedom-- I have always been able to appreciate that. Maybe because the last few years that I spent in Cuba were in such tight control that I yearned for that (freedom). When I finally made it here, even today, thirty-four years later, I treasure this country and I appreciate the freedom that we have in this country so much.

Are you a citizen of the United States?

Oh, yes, as soon as I had a chance, I became one in 1969.

That was very important to you?

Definitely, I'm part of it now.

What do you miss the most about your homeland?

I don't really miss anything because coming to this country is something that I always wanted. Having lived in Cuba only fifteen years, I didn't have a social life, I didn't go nightclubbing. I can't say that I missed any of that. I can talk today about the "Tropicana," the famous night club, but I remember that I went there once, two months before I left, and that's about the only nightclub that I ever went to. It's not that I miss anything like that. If anything, I miss the breeze-- the tropical breeze that you don't find in this part of the country. It's either cold air coming down from Canada ...but it's that tropical breeze that's something really to treasure.

Have you gone back to Cuba since you left?

I went back in 1979, sixteen years later. I left when I was sixteen, and I went back sixteen years later. I would like to go back for a visit.

What was that visit like in 1979?

Well, when I got there, my neighborhood was destroyed and I could barely recognize the buildings. All the neighbors were still there because people don't have the freedom to move around, and everybody is stuck in the same housing. So, I was able to see everybody that I left behind. The country was pretty much destroyed, and it was very sad going back and seeing all that.

And yet you'd like to go back, even though a lot of what you'd seen had been demolished...?

I'd like to see if it has gotten any worse.

Were there people that you looked up-- relatives, old friends-- when you went back?

Sure, I stayed at a friend's house. Besides that, I still have relatives there and friends-- lots of friends.

Dalia, I'm going to go back to your career track. After being at Channel 56, for-- what was it, fifteen years. Where did you go from there?

Well, remember that Channel 56 was only a part-time job. During those fifteen years, I also had a full-time job-- many different full-time jobs. There was a period in those fifteen years that I had three jobs.

What were they?

I did secretarial work for Prime Computer in Natick, for five years. I also, worked for three years at Bank of New England, which later became Fleet Bank doing secretarial work while I was doing Channel 56. While I worked at Prime Computer in Natick, I also worked in two stores, Filenes and Jordan Marsh, cashiering and doing customer service and sales. I also worked as a hostess in a restaurant. Those were weekend jobs. So, I would work my regular full-time job and at Channel 56 in the evenings, then Saturday afternoon I would tape the show, and Saturday and Sunday nights work in the restaurant or the stores. That's when I was bringing up my kids.

How do you feel about opportunities between the sexes? Do you feel that there are more opportunities given to men than to women?

Oh, definitely. Even today, things have improved tremendously for women but, still we have the double standard and still we have the "old boy's network." Even if 52% of the work-force is female, most of everything is still controlled by men. The higher salaries go to men, and the benefits- - we still have a lot of improvements to be made.

What do you feel is the best ammunition on for a woman, against this double standard?

A lot of people would tell you education. And yes, I believe an education is vital-- that's the reason I went out and I got myself one. But, you don't do anything with that education if you're not a fighter, and it seems that in this world, you have to fight for everything that you get. I don't mean to be disrespectful or unappreciative of this country and what it has given me, it's just that, that's the way it is around the world. It's human nature-- where ever you go, you have to fight for what you want. Otherwise, you're going to have to be content with being just one of the bunch.

And that's more important, more often than not, than an education?

More often than not, yes, you can go farther with that attitude than with an education. I think that for the first twenty-five years, almost thirty years, that's what brought me to a level of respect, recognition, and admiration—whatever you want to call it-- any of those words that I don't like to use. In recent years I went back to school, once I got rid of my kids. They got married and they went out on there own, so now I could dedicate some time to myself. Remarried-- to a wonderful Cuban man-- would you believe Cuban? Now, I have a college degree behind me that can give me a certain status but, honestly, I don't feel that a college degree can do anything for me because I'm already made.

You're doing it more for yourself.

Because it's a dream I always wanted to accomplish-- O.K., it's done, but not because I ever needed it to get ahead in life.

You mentioned your kids-- you have a son and a daughter. Did you raise them differently?

No, exactly the same. And how did I produce to two very different individuals? I don't know. They are very different, but they were from the day they were born. If anything, I tried to instill in my daughter, that anything her brother could do, she could d better. I tried to instill, in both of them that they were responsible for their actions; never to come home and blame a friend. That if they ever got into trouble, if they ever did anything, they made the decision to have that friend. Today, we have a wonderful relationship. She's in California; he's in Florida, and every now and then I get a telephone call... "Mom, you were so right!" That's the big pay -off.

Let's go back to your career. What happened at Channel 56?

Eventually, after fifteen years, the show was canceled because we got Univision and Telemundo in this area -- Spanish television is growing in the United States. I feel that it's very unfair because Channel 27, the Spanish language station here in Massachusetts, is not doing anything locally. All they are doing is transmitting what is fed to them through the cables. It all comes from Miami, California or South America. The value that show s like mine brought to this community, have disappeared. All the communities now are disconnected. Nobody knows what anybody else is doing, and it is sad.

How long ago was your show canceled?

In 1992. It's been five years-- I can't believe it.

What did you do after that?

I produced a couple of special programs in 1992 for the celebration of the discovery of America. From Puerto Rico and The Dominican Republic, I did two one hour specials for Channel 27. Then I went to work for the Lawrence Public School System as Media Facilitator, doing public relations and TV production for Channel 48, the school system's TV station. That was extremely rewarding. That was a very, very good era.

Why was it so rewarding?

Because I've accomplished a lot in my life; I have a lot of experience in communications, from writing the book to producing television, so I was able to bring all that to the kids in the city, and that's what made it so rewarding.

You were able to use your experiences and skills and then pass them on to the next generation.

Well put. Still I'm very active even though I no longer work for the schools. I'm very active with school groups and at different schools; I'll go do talks and seminars.

So you've fulfilled the role of teacher as well?

Hmmm, I don't like to think of myself as a teacher. Teachers are very special people. I'd like to just give what I have, and what I have is knowledge. Knowledge that I have acquired through the years.

I guess, we often think about teachers only as the people that stand in front of a blackboard with chalk, but really, teachers can be your parents, friends...

Oh, definitely, those are the best. And, I do enjoy the process of giving back. What better way to give back then to kids.

Are you active in the community?

Very much! Too much. I'm stretching myself too thin at times. I'm on several boards, and the problem is that I don't like to be on the Board of Directors, just to be on the roster-- I attend the meetings. And, I feel very guilty if I have to call in and cancel because I feel that it is my obligation to be there. For example, at the YMCA Corporate Board, I have perfect attendance. They laugh and say, "Dalia, we don't have to call, we know she'll be there." People have grown accustomed to that. But I feel very strongly that if you're going to belong to a board, it has to be an organization that you feel strongly about, and then make the commitment that you're going to be there, and you're going to contribute.

What other affiliations do you have?

For ten years I was President of the Association of Latin Americans in Communications. For seven years we gave a scholarship to a Boston University student. For that, I had to give a dinner party and dance to raise funds. We gave whatever money we collected to Boston University and they doubled the money to a Hispanic student. They used their own criteria to select a student. For seven years we did that, and it was very rewarding to know that we were contributing, in this case to a Hispanic student's education. As president for those ten years, I published a monthly newsletter-- it was a lot of work. We also had, for six or seven years, a Spanish composition contest to promote the use of Spanish among our young people. Even though, I have never been in favor of bilingual education, I do believe that kids should maintain or learn a foreign language, because that is an education in itself. But not necessarily because I feel it's the state or city's obligation to provide that education. I think that rests with the family.

We left off talking about your job at Channel 56 and some of your other undertakings and affiliations...

Well, after I was crushed by the cancellation of the show -- I'm not going to lie about it-- for about three months after that, I couldn't talk about it. It was my baby, I created that show, I proposed the idea to them ...to have them...

It was like canceling you.

Sure, I took it very personally. To tell me that, "we don't think that the community needs your show any longer, because now there are two channels with Spanish language programming: Univision and Telemundo, and we no longer need you." It was like, "you don't know what your talking about," but how can you fight against city hall?

So you went on to work in the Lawrence School System-- how long did you do that for?

I did that for two and a half years, just long enough to go back to school and get my degree.

What school did you end up going to?

Franklin Pierce College in Salem, New Hampshire, and I got a Bachelors in General Studies. It only took me twenty-four years to get a degree!

And now, what do you do professionally?

(Laugh, Laugh) I forgot, we're getting to the best part-- Rumbo! My husband, Alberto and I, are publishing Rumbo, the Spanish newspaper of the Merrimack Valley. We started in May of 1996, and to our surprise, it has been very, very successful. We thought we were going to have to pump money into the paper for maybe a year, because publishing a newspaper is expensive, especially when you have reporters working for you. We have two part-timers and we pay them for the articles, we don't want anyone writing for free. I wrote for free for too many years, and I don't want... it's not a lot that we pay them, but we want them to have the satisfaction of getting something-- whatever we can afford. Hopefully, some day they'll be able to get a lot more money--we'll be able to afford it. But to our surprise, since the third edition, the paper has been paying for itself. It has had great success within the business community; the Chamber of Commerce recommends us all the time, as a viable source to reach out to the Hispanic community. We see that we're getting the respect and admiration of the business community, as much as the Spanish speaking community in the area.

What are your plans, aspirations or dreams?

I don't have any. I don't make plans. My life has been so unpredictable that I don't dare make plans. I just make sure that I enjoy the present and that my present is a good foothold for creating a good future. As long as you take the right steps today, it can only lead in the right direction. I'm just doing the right things. I brought up my kids, they have a good life, now I can take care of myself and I'm just making sure that I continue to work hard. I enjoy working-- my life is work. If you look at my America On Line profile it asks, "what do you do for hobbies?" I work. The personal quote, "work hard and that will keep you out of trouble." That's my philosophy. My whole life is work, but I have been fortunate enough to work at things that I enjoy doing. If I didn't like a job, I just didn't take it, because I think it's more of a punishment. If I could say a nasty word-- for someone to work at something that they don't enjoy, it's like prostituting themselves, just in exchange for a salary. I've been in that situation, that's why I don't do it. That's why I'd rather refuse, because I know how painful it is. I don't know what I'm going to be doing five years from now, let alone ten. I don't know about next year, what's going to be of my life. I don't if I'm going to have a big position with a great job, or my house is going to bum down and I'm going to be homeless. Who knows? Just make sure that you have the proper insurance.

Dalia, how did you end up living in Lawrence?

I lived in Chelsea for eighteen years, that's why I call Chelsea my home, because I lived sixteen (years) in Cuba, but eighteen in Chelsea. Eventually I moved to Natick, because I was looking for a better school system for my son, who was entering high school, and I didn't want him involved with the drug scene at

Chelsea High. Natick had a very good school system and when he turned eighteen and moved to Florida, Alberto and I had met, we got married, and we lived in Natick for about a year after we got married, or less than that. When I got laid-off from Prime Computer, we decided that if we wanted to buy a house, and I had to look for another job anyway, why not look in this direction, along Route 93, because he was working in Malden, so it would be more convenient for him. I didn't have anything tying me down; I didn't have a school system tying me down to Natick, or a job, so why not move in this direction. We were coming to Lawrence every weekend to the Hispanic restaurants and the factory outlets. Every single weekend we were coming here.

It just made sense.

So, it only made sense, and we started looking for properties along Route 93 and they were very expensive. When we looked around in Lawrence, it was a lot cheaper. If this is the place where we come every week-end, why not live here. We bought this little house, we love it-- it's a very nice neighborhood, nice backyard, and we grow a vegetable garden every summer. We've been very pleased.

I'm going to change the course of the questions, and ask you what your concept of beauty is, especially as it pertains to women?

I hate beauty pageants with a passion! I have been a judge at beauty pageants many times, and it always pains me to see the exhibition of flesh... to the point, that I no longer do it. I refuse, and I tell them the reason why I refuse. I really get furious because, you could have any empty brain who looks good at a beauty pageant-- and don't try to get a sound out of their mouths, because it doesn't make any sense. Very often it happens. They're so empty, and I don't think that makes a woman beautiful, or a man for that matter, because beauty can go both ways. What's the sense in looking at a wonderful body, a beautiful physique, if you can't have an intelligent conversation with that person? You know what really turns me on? A good conversation, an intelligent conversation-- man or woman. That's real beauty, when you are able to share a good conversation with someone. Physical beauty is irrelevant. Inside, brains ... nothing is more exciting than to have a long conversation with someone.

MARIA TERESA NARGANES

Maria Teresa Narganes, born in Spain, came to the United States as a refugee from Cuba. Former principal of the Tarbox School in Lawrence, she shares how important it is to keep your heritage alive. This interview was conducted on February 1997 by Yadira Betances.

Why don't you tell me where you were born?

I was born in Spain to Spanish parents, but my father was actually born in Cuba. Most of my family had immigrated to Cuba, so we had ties to Cuba and then my father went to Cuba.

What year did he go to Cuba?

Oh my goodness, I think in 1948, 1947.

The late 1940s?

I was just a baby and then my mother stayed in Spain until he got settled. Then, when I was about 3 or 4, he called us to join him in Havana, Cuba and we did. Then, we were there through my elementary school years, "elementary" in Latin American school terms.

Which is what grades?

Up until sixth grade. And then I had met a very wonderful American family who owned their own business. They had their own paper factory. They invited me with my parents' permission to come up here to study for a year.

When you say here, where?

To the United States to Newburyport, Newbury, Massachusetts, Byfield. He had been a selectman in Byfield.

What was his name?

George Bohant, so those were the plans. See my schooling had been bilingual when I first began schooling, I went to Dominicas Francesas. So I learned French, English and Spanish all at once that was up to the second grade. Then my parents moved from Old Havana to Miramar, which was like a suburb of Havana. They put me in private school, but it was not Catholic.

What kind of work did your parents do?

We were very poor. The reason why they moved was because they took care of an apartment building, they were the caretaker and for exchange they got free rent. My father worked in a hotel in Old Havana. He did everything. It was a small hotel. He worked practically 24 hours a day. I really don't recall. If he was at home he was sleeping and I was an only child. He maintained things and that is why he worked so much. He knew he wasn't going to leave me too much money, but he wanted to give me an education. That was important to me. He did not have an opportunity to get an education.

Up to what grade did he go?

He grew up in Spain because when he was very small, just days, he and his mother went back to Spain. He grew up in the country. He went to school basically when it rained, when he could not work outside, when it was not crop time. So that was the kind of schooling that he had. It was very basic. How many years he went? Not too many. I don't know. Then he got to be old enough that he could do a man's share of work out on the field, that's what he did. That's why he immigrated to Cuba looking for a better way of life. So, but he had all the basic knowledge, he knows how to read, write, he knows how to do the

numbers. He does not know algebra, though. To him, one of the things he regretted most in his life was the fact he did not have the ability to go to school and that was what he wanted to give me. So he wanted to give me the best schools for me, which were also very expensive. So he worked night and day to put me, an only child, through school. So I went to very good schools. From the Dominicas Francesas, which were considered the top, only the very, very wealthy went there, he moved me to a new school which was opened up by a friend of the family. I remember his first name, but I wish I could remember his last name. Anyway, he began a school, which was a bilingual school.

Bilingual? What languages?

English and Spanish. So the way it would work at that time, you would go to school in the morning, come home, at midday you have your lunch and you go back in the afternoon and go to the afternoon session and then go home by 6 or 6:30 at night. It was a very long day. The bus would go and pick me up. The morning session was all in Spanish with a Spanish teacher. Then I'd go home, have lunch and come back. The afternoon session was with an English teacher and American teacher. All in English all the asignaturas (assignments). I knew English fairly well. Then I got to know this family that actually moved into one of the apartments because they were very luxury apartments in Miramar right by the ocean. The family, the Bohants, they kind of just adopted me.

Because you were so cute.

Also, I reminded them of a Spanish version their granddaughter who they had just lost to Leukemia. She had just died. She was 7-years-old. And I was 7-years-old. I resembled her although I've seen pictures I don't think I resembled her. She was blonde with blue eyes and I have black hair and black eyes. But she had very chubby cheeks and kind of fat mainly due to her illness. But that was me. Round face, chubby cheeks, kind of a roly-poly. So, they befriended my parents which was kind of funny because they did not speak English and the Bohant did not speak Spanish.

Were you the translator?

I began to be. They taught me. They invite me. We are going out to get some chicken. They would go and say to my parents, can we invite her and my father would say, "Sure." And we would go to "Pick-em Chicken" which was like Kentucky Fried Chicken and they would be talking to me like what is this and what is that? That was one of the ways we began to develop my English. I knew English, but not well enough to speak it, not fluently. And, yes, I began to translate and of course they picked up a little bit of Spanish and my parents picked up a little bit of English. So we had some communication. But the relationship developed so much that they even fixed a room in their apartment for me. I became like their granddaughter. They joined a country club which of course was well beyond what my parents could afford to give me and I was on the roster as one of their family members. Through their relationship I met and I had opportunity which I never had. For instance, one Sunday I remember going on a beautiful yacht owned by the Coca-Cola gentleman and his son and his wife. The reason I remember this was because I was sick, sick, sick, sick I will never forget that. But I just had so many wonderful experiences. One of the things that they wanted to do for me was they would pay for me to live with their daughter and her children and spend a year here in school in Newburyport. My parents said fine, that would be good. I would learn the English language better. Then I finished the sixth grade there that is like the end of the primary grade going to the secondary grades, they thought that would be a nice transition. Unfortunately, that happened around 1960, so I came here to school and I stayed. During the year, what I called my grandparents because they were like my grandparents, they were thrown out of literally with just the clothes on their back and at gun point and were put on a plane. So they came here with nothing. They left a \$5 bill on my grandfather's wallet, so they lost everything he owned because everything he owned, he had invested in Cuba with the United State's government assurance because in Latin America there was a lot of unrest and they had been promoting United States businesses in Latin America so they gave him a guarantee while to this day, we are still trying to get that guarantee. We haven't seen anything. Not even a dime of that guarantee.

What happened to your parents?

My parents were left up there. I didn't see them for six years. I went to Newburyport High School. I graduated from Newburyport High School. I didn't speak Spanish for six years. Not one word. There was nobody else who spoke Spanish. Because we couldn't afford anything else, even though I was admitted, I wanted to learn languages, that was my hope. I wanted to be a translator in the United Nations. One of the places where I did apply was Middlebury College which is a wonderful school. I did get admitted (accepted), but at that time there were no scholarships. We couldn't afford it. So, I ended up going to UMass Amherst. So I went to UMass Amherst for two years and I was only 15 when I went to UMass Amherst.

Why so young?

Because when I came here I was 12 okay? I just had turned 12. They wanted to put me in the seventh grade and my grandfather said no because he knew what I knew. Not only how smart I was, which I was smart, I don't know what happened to my smartness since then, but the curriculum I had been exposed to, which was a lot more than 7th grade. He said no, she can't go to 7th grade she's going to be bored. So they compromised. See, he had been on the School Committee, so they knew him and he was able to do these things. So they compromised and they said well we'll give her a test whatever grade she tests as, that's where we'll place her. Well, I tested as a second-year high school student. Well they said she can't be a sophomore, she's 12, and so they compromise and put me in as a 12-year-old in high school in 9th grade. Up to this date, I don't know if that was good or bad because definitely academically I was always on the honor roll and the National Honor Society and there was no problem. Emotionally I wasn't ready I don't think, for high school. I was very, very, very shy. Very shy, which is kind of a surprise to people that know me now. Very shy, very shy. But I made it through high school and I graduated it when I was 15, went to UMASS. I graduated in May and my birthday is in June, so I turned 16 and I went to UMASS when I was 16. I was there for a couple of years then my parents came. I had been asking as a refugee to bring my parents. So they finally came out. One of the first people to come out.

What year did they come?

1966, December. And they came and they were relocated in Rockland, Mass. So now here my parents are here, I'm at UMASS, my grandparents are in Newburyport. My parents have culture shock like you wouldn't believe. You would not believe. Everything. Unfortunately, they came here and the person who was in charge of the Immigration Center the guy was a crook, who was caught and was jailed and whatever. The money that had been given to them to at least begin buy a coat, a pillow, he pocketed that money. So he put them to work in a shoe factory in Lawrence, Mass. and he took them to buy the basic things at Grants, I don't know if you remember. From their meager... they worked for a \$1 an hour, from their meager earnings, they had to pay back everything when he did get the money that came out afterward of course.

They were commuting from Rockland to Lawrence to work?

Now, they were living in Rockland. That's another thing, they were earning a \$1 an hour and their apartment was \$90 a month. So it was like, plus they had to pay back. It was a very difficult time. So here I'm going to college. So I just left (School) and I went to work in Boston.

Doing what?

Well, through my grandparents contact, I went to a year's secretarial school which was School for Women and then I got a job on the secretarial pool at the First National Bank of Boston because I was bilingual and they were looking for bilingual secretaries. So I got a job through his contacts from previously. My grandfather before he had gone to Cuba he had a very successful lucrative export business through the First National Bank of Boston. So he had contacts there and he called them, "Can you?" And they did. They hired me. They put me on the secretarial pool. I was there for a while and I commuted from Rockland because I started living with my parents. They were also trying to put me through school,

Channel School for Women, so when I got a little more experience, I was given a job for an international officer. Then, I moved on to an assistance vice president. By the time I left there, I was working for the director in charge of all international operations, which was a very nice job and he was a very nice man. But one thing that happened there was I had moved up as far as I could go. Now I was an administrative assistant. He traveled a lot. I took care of the office. I kind of took his phone messages. He would call from Latin America, I would translate, do this, type things, delegate the work that he gave me, that was basically my job. It ended up being very boring. You know, how often you clean your files. So when he was there, it was nice because there were a lot of reports, presentations to the board, if he was opening up a new company there were a lot of nice things to do, I got to translate by-laws and I enjoyed all of that. I even got to entertain the wives. I got to show them Filene's Basement which I knew well. Take them out to lunch. So it was fun, but I didn't think I was being challenged enough. So, at that time they were trying to open up an office in Mexico City and I was not attached and I looked and I thought I think I could do that job. I researched it a little bit more and I went to my boss and I said I want to apply for this job. He was kind of ticked at me. He didn't know how to answer me. He said but you don't have a degree. I said, but I have two years of college. We need someone with a degree. Of course they always hired Harvard Business graduates. I definitely did not have that. But I said "but I have six years experience at the bank and you are going to be training the person. You can train me! And you know how wonderful I am and this and that". He didn't think that was a good idea. I became very very angry, especially when the person that was hired was a graduate from Smith (College). If I needed a college degree, I was going to get a college degree. But I didn't have the money and my parents had no money. At one time I was looking through the paper and I saw that BU (Boston University) was looking for potential bilingual teachers and, mind you, I had friends I had met at UMass who were teachers who had graduated and worked, and I was talking to them, especially during the summer months when I was working and they were off. This was a new program. They were in need of bilingual teachers and they were looking for somebody at night. Actually, the perfect candidate was somebody that had some college background, preferably two years. It was a two year program. They would get paid. It was a scholarship and involved some work in the community and work in the school; they gave you a stipend a week. I saw that and I thought, "Wow, this was made for me". I promptly applied and was accepted.

What year was this?

Early 1970s. Well, I graduated in 1975 or was it 73. I would have to go back and look at my degree.

Didn't you tell me you started working in Lawrence in 1975?

Yeah, thereabouts. I went and graduated. Through this training and work, I also got the opportunity to work in Boston. I worked in the schools in Boston in grades 2 and 6. And then when I got my degree I decided, you know, I applied to Boston. They offered us all jobs in Boston. But I did not want to commute. By that time, my parents had moved from Rockland to Lawrence.

How did they hear about Lawrence?

They had met some people. You know how they had relocated to Rockland, those people had relocated, some friends of theirs from Cuba that I didn't know, had relocated to Lawrence. And they were happy here in Lawrence. They were working in the mills. So they had talked to my parents. I remember we drove here one Sunday and we saw the Lawrence Common and we thought that was so beautiful. It was Sunday afternoon and we brought some food, and we sat on the Common and we had lunch and we thought it was lovely. So my parents thought... Rockland was just... it doesn't even have a center. So we moved.

Where did you first moved to?

We lived on Union Street where is now the elderly apartments. There were some homes there. It was a Two-Decker. Then my mother found a better apartment on 162 Newbury Street. We lived on the third floor for a long time. My parents worked double shifts as much as they could. By working double shifts

and saving some money, their dream was obviously to buy a home. So they were able to buy a home in South Lawrence, on Brookfield Street, Brookfield and Farley. We were one of the first Hispanics to ever move down there. We were so proud. It was a three family home. It was just what my parents wanted. I don't know if you know my father, but he is a very meticulous man and everything has to be perfect with him. Well, as soon as we moved in, the neighbors around there thought, "Oh God, there goes the neighborhood"

Where did your parents worked?

My parents worked at Lawrence Maid for many years then, my father got a job at Malden Mills and he worked there in the shipping department for many years.

Are they still alive?

My father is still alive. My mother got a job at AT&T, Western Electric and she worked there until she died. My mother has been dead for 17 years.

What are your parents' names?

Antonio and Ines Lopez.

How long have you been married?

I got married in 1977.

How did you meet Francisco Narganes?

In church at Holy Rosary Church.

Both of you sang in the choir?

I sang in the choir. He was new. He had just come in. This was in 1968. He's from Spain, but he came through Cuba. From Cuba he had gone to El Salvador. We met at Holy Rosary at the Spanish Mass which at that time was the only Mass. He had just come here. He was a Spanish teacher at Central Catholic High School and he was learning English. And that's how we met. My mother was the one who actually met him and because he was from Spain "Oh my God." There was nobody from Spain here at that time, so it was like; you have to come to our house. That's really how I met him. Then the relationship developed. My house became like his home in a way. My family was his family. The relationship began as friendship. I was never home because working in Boston I had to leave at 6 O'clock in the morning and I didn't get home sometimes until 6:30 p.m. Because 93 wasn't like it is now. Now the traffic is bad but if there was a little rain or something, I remember coming home at midnight. This is one of the reasons why I didn't want that commute anymore. I wanted to get up, open my door, walk out and I'll be right there at work.

When did you get married?

Father Diego Perino came for the wedding. We were able to also bring to the wedding my husband's parents from Spain and one of his sisters and her husband. So he had a little bit of family. We didn't go on a honeymoon. We bypassed that in order to be able to help them come here for the wedding. We got married in February. We had our 20th wedding anniversary on February 19.

When you came to the United States to study in Byfield, Newburyport, was the U.S. what you expected? What was your first impression?

I forgot to tell you that the Christmas before, I had come here for Christmas and in Cuba the vacation time was a lot longer. One of the reasons I had to come was because my mother was pregnant with my brother at the time and she was due January 8 and it was just another way to alleviate some of the burden on her. I came here on a mini-vacation with my grandparents to their family house. I came from very, very hot sticky weather to extremely cold, cold. I remember I had never in my life been so cold. I'd be sitting in

the car with all these coats and I'll still be shivering. I can still remember that I was so shocked. By the same token, whenever their family would visit Cuba where I felt comfortable and happy, I didn't think it was hot at all. They would be like (grasping their breath) I cannot breath. That was a little bit of shock. But after that they lived in Byfield at the time and I had a chance at the time to visit the school; to meet people, to go on a hay ride, to go caroling, to go ice skating. I thought it was marvelous. I mean, those were all experiences that I never dreamed of. Plus, everyone always treated me extra special. I never, never felt strange. On the contrary, oh you speak Spanish; it was always made a big deal of. I was always made to feel special.

So you never felt discriminated against?

Never, until I set foot in Lawrence.

Why was that?

I don't know. I've always said that had I come to Lawrence, I think Lawrence is a unique community because I've lived here for what, 30 years or so. Lawrence is a very close-minded community. I think the word ignorance might be too harsh. But had I not had those experiences in the past I might have been mislead as to that's the way Americans are and they are not.

How long have you been a principal? I. You have been here six years at the Tarbox School?

Yes, I began as a principal in April. I got appointed before then, but because I had a brand new baby and my mother had just passed away. I began in April 1980 and I've been a principal ever since. I was first appointed as principal of the Lawlor School and the Park Street School I was principal there for two years. Then I was transferred. The Park Street School closed which is now the Family Health Center. The former principal of the Lawlor School returned to the Lawlor School and the principal from here, Mr. O'Neill, retired. So I was moved to the Tarbox School which at that time had over 600 students.

How many students now?

400. Better, much better when I came to the Tarbox School it had a bad reputation. It had always had a bad reputation.

Why is that?

I don't know. The students. It was mainly bilingual and because of that I think. I'm happy to say I changed that. I think we have a wonderful school. I think now we have a good reputation. It's now known as a good school. So we've accomplished a lot. I was here for about five years. I think, and then, I was happy here! And at the time Superintendent (Eugene) Thayer wanted to build a diagnostic center and they were also in the process of building the Arlington School. So basically, I think what happened was he tied the two things together and learned that the Arlington School was not going to be open in time for September. So late in May, June, he closed the school. He said he was closing the school and my staff got relocated, basically all of my staff was relocated to the Arlington School and I was lucked out because they already picked the principal for the Arlington School, Mr. Cleary and he had been working for a while on the curriculum and plans and whatever. So there I was all summer long wondering what I was going to do. It wasn't until I came back after the summer that we went to our first meeting, the administrative council meeting where I was handed the things for the Leonard School. So in my not so shy way, said "Gee, I think somebody forgot to tell me something. The superintendent was right there and he said, "Oh, yeah, by the way," and Mr. Cleary who was principal of the Leonard and apparently had not been told...I can still remember that meeting. So he said, by the way, Mrs. Narganes is now the new principal of the Leonard School and Mr. Cleary is going to help us in the central office. Help Mrs. McDonough who at that time was director of elementary with some special project that we have at the Central office. Mr. Cleary after 12 at the Leonard was removed and I was placed there. In fact, I went in along with the kids and I'm asking the kids "Where is the office, by the way." They were saying, "On the second floor" and I said, "Okay" and when I got there. That is how I began my tenure at the Leonard,

which was about five to six years too. After that, I was reassigned here and I'm very happy to be back here at the Tarbox School. I feel this is my home.

Do you still consider yourself Spanish or do you consider yourself American?

I think I truly consider myself truly bilingual and bicultural. I have both cultures. I am equally at home in one or the other. I don't feel ill at ease in here. I feel very American. When I travel, whether is Latin America or Spain, I feel very at home there too. I hope that my children have that feeling. I have four children.

How do you keep your Spanish heritage at home? Do you cook Spanish Foods, listen to Spanish music? How do you keep that alive?

Spanish is an integral part of our lives. It's been getting a little more difficult because of the American influence is really so strong. So with my little one I know that it is easier for him to speak in English. We always made an effort to speak in Spanish at home because we knew they were going to learn English, but they were not going to get Spanish. So, my kids all know Spanish because we try to speak it at home. What happens in my case and my husband always tells me "Speak in Spanish". If you talk to me in English, I will answer you in English. I won't focus on what language I'm using, is what you are asking me, the meaning and what I am answering. Unless you point out to me that I am now talking in English. I don't know whether I'm talking in English or Spanish. That to me is what I think is truly bilingual. So someone who is not truly bilingual will know, will have to refocus. Now I have to do it in Spanish, now I'm doing it in English. I think my kids have that ability with the exception of the little one. He will definitely use English every chance he can. When he speaks in Spanish, there is an accent and we have always said "Gee, we should send him..." but hopefully he will pick it up. He understands everything but he just doesn't have the fluency. So his fluency is in English because his schooling is in English. That is what he likes to use.

As a Hispanic parent, have you raised your daughters differently than your sons? Have you been stricter with your daughters?

They would say yes. I don't think so. I don't think I have raised my daughters the Hispanic way. I think in that sense I was very Americanized because I was raised here. I'm the one who believes if you teach your children right from wrong and you try to give them good morals, solid background, and with that you involve family values, you involve religious values, a sense of self-esteem, and then you have to let them make their own decisions. Eventually they are going to have to make their own decisions and no matter how protective you are, you know if they are going to do wrong, they are going to do wrong. I've always been aware of whom their friends are, where they are going, I want to know where they are, who they are with. They have always had a curfew, they have always had a time when they had to go to bed, but I don't think that is more cultural. You find American parents who do the same thing. It is just a matter of the way they were raised. I have tried to make them feel proud that they not only know English well, but they know Spanish and that they have this background. That is why we try to go back. We could not go back to Cuba, so we try to go back to Spain, so they have a little bit more of that culture and they have gotten to know their grandparents there and their cousins.

How often do you go back to Spain?

We used to go every summer when they were little. It is financially impossible for us to do it now, especially when paying for college tuition. Maybe we could have had a much nicer home, more stylish way of life but we thought that was a really important thing to do for the kids. It was vacation, but it wasn't vacation because we got you live with your family and you just shared with them. It was very enjoyable obviously because you were in another cultural setting. That was always very very good. They have this sense, even my oldest son wants to go back and live there. So they like to travel and experience new things. They are aware of their culture and I think that through that they developed an awareness of other cultures and understanding, a tolerance, an appreciation. There are so many beautiful things out in the world, so many languages. I think we try to show them that they are special in that and they shouldn't feel bad, on the contrary, they should feel that they are special. And we are.

MARIA DOLORES RUIZ

Sandra DeVita interviewed Maria Dolores Ruiz, an immigrant from Cuba, on January 24th, 1997. In this interview Maria shared her views on Hispanic male-female relationship, divorce and family.

Maria, please give me your married name first and then your maiden name.

My married name is Maria Dolores Ruiz and Pabron was my maiden name

Your date and place of birth

Santa Clara, Las Villas, Cuba, April 12, 1924

Let's start the interview with why and how you came to the United States. In particular, I'd like to know which members of your family were the very first to come here.

My daughter and her husband

What were your reasons for coming to the United States?

Political motives

Tell me about that

My brother motivated the move. He was exiled and left on a boat to come here. This was during the Bay of Pigs Invasion. They caught him, detained him and then sentenced him to death

What happened after they took your brother prisoner?

They held a hearing-- it had no merit but they had one anyway. They sentenced a total of fifteen to death.

And were you with him?

Yes, I was present, by his side, and I wanted to go with him to the firing squad to give him strength but, one of the officers in charge wouldn't let me because I was his sister and he felt it wouldn't be right under the circumstances.

Were there other members of your family who were in the military?

My whole family was in the military. My father, uncles, husband, brother-in-law.

Who made the decision to come to the United States?

My daughter and her husband decided they would leave and bring my husband and me with them.

But how did you make the personal decision to leave. Was it your husband's idea, yours or did you make it jointly?

Every decision was made jointly, and under the circumstances, because he was also in the military it was inevitable that he too would have problems

Tell me more about your brother.

My brother was a military officer under Batista. He was part of a battalion in Guantanamo and when Castro seized power, he left Cuba and came to Miami by boat. Then he enrolled in the brigade that fought at the Bay of Pigs, and that's when they captured him and fourteen others.

Did he tell you about his interaction with Castro?

Yes, he had a meeting with Castro, who promised him that nothing would happen to him-- that he would pardon him and release him. My brother had been sent to Castro's mother's farm to keep guard over her so that nothing would happen to her. With respect to his promises to my brother, Castro betrayed him. My brother had his meeting with Castro on the morning of September 6th, and the next evening, the 7th-- he was put to death.

When you thought about leaving Cuba, did you consider other countries, besides the United States, to emigrate to?

No, I never considered any other.

Tell me about your voyage to the U.S.

We left Spain after three year and arrived here (Lawrence). My daughter and her husband were already here.

Maria, in what year did you actually leave Cuba to go to Spain?

1962

And, why did you go to Spain first?

Because all flights to the U.S. were booked, and it was easier going through Spain first.

Tell me about your stay in Spain.

Well, we were comfortable, especially with the aid we were receiving from my daughter and her husband, who were both already working in the U.S. I'd stay home taking care of my granddaughter and my husband.

So, even though you spent three years in Spain, it was always your intention to get to the U.S.?

Always-- since the day we left our own country.

Before actually coming to the U.S., how did you envision it to be? Did you have any expectations, and were they met?

I only thought about living peacefully, without problems. That my kids would live well and that my husband wouldn't encounter problems.

So, when you finally got here, what surprised you the most about this country?

It was exactly like living at home. I lived peacefully. My husband and I worked, my daughter worked. Nobody bothered us and we've lived well.

So, your life didn't change drastically, nor did your standard of living.

Not at all.

Did anything make an impression on you?

The abundance of everything! Of food, clothing and other things that were already diminishing in my own country.

What did you miss the most?

My family.

Who stayed behind?

My parents and my sister

Do you, or have you continued any political activity with your own country?

No, but I did. There (Cuba) I did many things clandestinely to see if the government would change but nothing was able to be done.

What types of things did you do...?

Anything that was against the government. Individual acts to try to break connections--- again, anything that would be considered against the government.

Are you a citizen (of the U.S.)?

Yes

How long have you been a citizen?

About four or five years. I didn't pass (the test) the first time... they failed me because of the written part.

When was your first attempt...?

In 1980.

Obviously, it was very important to you to become a citizen...because you made the effort a second time

Yes, I made the effort.

And why was it so important to you?

Well, in appreciation for what this country had done for me.

What did you do to ensure your passing (the test) the second time?

I studied and prepared. I had a good teacher, Mr. Nunzio DiMarca.

And finally...?

Finally, I passed.

That's great. Do you drive?

No

And your husband did he?

No, I never let him.

At this time, I'd like to ask you for your husband's name since I'd neglected to do so at the beginning of the interview.

Prisciliano Ruiz

And, does he have another name (i.e. a middle name)

Heriberto

So his full name is Prisciliano Heriberto Ruiz

Yes

And, what are your children's' names?

Jose Ramon Ruiz and Hilda Catalina Perez

Perez is her married name?

Yes, her husband's (last) name

Maria, what do you think about the relationship between the Hispanic male and female-- here, in this country as well as in your homeland of Cuba?

Well, in my country there was a lot of unity and respect between the sexes. Friendships existed because there were real friendships. Here, sometimes you can have a male friend but you have to be cautious because sometimes you misjudge (the person).

Tell me about your relationship with your husband?

My relationship with my husband was marvelous. We were married 56 years. He was like my father, mother, brother...everything to me. He was a great companion and helped me out with all of the household chores. He'd cook, clean and do many things around the house so that I wouldn't have to do them.

It strikes me that this (her husband helping out with the housework) is very different from the customs...
Very different from the typical Hispanic customs. Well, yes. In Cuba it is customary for the men to help their companions and to share in the responsibilities of the home and child rearing.

That's great.

Yes, it's very nice. There's no machismo.

Do you see machismo here within the Hispanics?

Yes, completely. It's now that they're trying to eradicate machismo, but it still exists within the men.

And, so do you think there are differences between the opportunities that exist for Hispanic males and females?

Yes and I think there's a lot of sexism that goes unnoticed yet it exists ... The men seem to have better jobs, salaries...

Better opportunities?

Yes, better opportunities.

Have you witnessed racism against Hispanics in the U.S.?

Well, there's lots of racism in the U.S. Hispanics are criticized for anything: for their way of being, for their language, or being Hispanic.

And how do you feel about that?

Well, I've always been lucky. I've never been discriminated against. I've always been attended to wherever I've gone. I have friendships with both Americans as well as Hispanics... for me they are all equal. And I have never felt discriminated against.

But, you have witnessed it against others?

Yes, I have.

Maria, does the Cuban tradition of the men helping the women out with the housekeeping continue in your family?

Yes, both with my daughter and my granddaughter.

Tell me about this.

My son-in-law is a homebody and helps my daughter out with everything, and my granddaughter's husband is exactly the same even though he's of Irish/Japanese background.

They are very compatible in that sense.

What do you think of Hispanic men in general? More specifically, what about the Hispanic men of Lawrence?

Well, there are good and bad-- it all depends. Each has their own ideas and beliefs. You can't say that one way or one type of person is right amidst so many Hispanics, so many people. I find it fine. There's solidarity.

When I think of some the customs of Hispanic men in Lawrence that I have witnessed, I think about them whistling at women. What do you think about that?

I'm not in favor of that. There are times in which it might be acceptable but when there's a lack of respect shown it isn't. (This lack of respect is shown) through vocabulary and actions. And, this I don't condone.

What do you think accounts for these (cultural) differences in the way women are treated? Using for examples: the Cuban tradition where women are aided and supported by their men.

I don't know exactly (how it is now) but, in the past, men and women supported each other, they worked and struggled through things together. They took care of their families, home, work, whatever needed tending to.

And why do you think it's different here?

There are different races, lifestyles and customs.

Let's continue our conversation regarding the Hispanic male. How and when did you meet your husband?

We met through a mutual friend. I was twelve years old and in school but I was taken out of school when we started dating and by the time I was fourteen, we were married. My father gave me permission and his mother gave him his.

You were fourteen and he was...?

Eighteen when we were married.

When was your first child born?

Within nine months of being married.

What did your husband do for a living?

First he had his own business, and then he enlisted in the military. Later he enrolled in nursing school and eventually worked as a nurse at the military hospital. Later he became a pharmacist, and was both a pharmacist and nurse.

And what did you do... after you left school?

I eventually went back to school, so at the very least I could educate myself more, but I did it at home with my son... I now had a baby at home.

But the majority of time...?

First and foremost, I was a mother and wife-- always have been.

What was your life like as young wife and mother of a child?

Well, my mom used to take care of my son so that I could go out with my husband. We'd get out and go sightseeing or dancing whenever we could, and if not, then he'd get out on his own. He had his highs and his lows, like any other young man, but he always returned to my house; to me. We never discussed separation or anything of that sort.

So you know that once in a while he'd go out with another woman but...?

Only once did I know about it- only once.

And did it bother you to know...?

Of course it did, and I'm very jealous, but it had to happen. We got back together, resumed our relationship and everything was forgotten. Because we were both very in love with each other everything was forgiven.

Do you consider this situation different from say, pure adultery?

Yes-- of course.

In what way are they different?

Pure adultery is the absence of a husband or wife because they are with their lovers. Male adultery is always seen differently from that of women but it's still adultery. The first time it happens, you can forgive but if it goes beyond that, that can't be forgiven.

How important is education?

It's one of the most important things for survival. Without it there's nothing.

Is the education of women just as important as that of men?

Completely. Education knows no gender.

You have both a son and daughter. Would you say that you raised them differently?

Well, they were raised in Cuba where the lifestyle is different. However, everyone has their own personality (which also molds them).

But you wouldn't deny your daughter the opportunities offered to your son.

No, they would both be treated equally.

It's customary for Hispanics to give their sons more freedom than their daughters.

Actually, I think freedom should be given to both. In this day and age girls have just as much freedom as boys.

What are the major reasons for the conflicts between men and women?

It's actually caused by a lack of family unity. There is not the love, warmth and understanding that once existed within families. In the past, if you said "grandmother"-- it meant something. Today it means nothing. Parents are not united to give their children the strength and valor to persevere and do something with their lives. If you don't have this solidarity within your family you cannot get through life.

What are the causes of this familial lack of unity?

I imagine that it's sometimes caused by parents not being at home because they work and don't have the time to spend with their children. Children are handed over to whoever they can get to take care of them (while they work). When they get home at night they are both tired and there's not the unity that once existed between parents and their children. There's a lot of divorce. People get divorced over anything and don't think about their children. I think that the word "divorce" is a big and ugly word and people shouldn't be predisposed to just accepting it.

What do you think accounts for this increase in divorce?

Freedom. Freedom is causing it.

What happens when you have freedom?

You try to live your life. You try to do things that you couldn't before. You don't need to answer to anyone. You are free and the owner of your actions.

And, is there a price to pay for that freedom?

The price you might pay is that many times after a divorce you might think that you still love the person you left and you think about it a lot. But, then it's too late and you need to move forward.

Maria, we haven't discussed the topic of religion yet. But, I know that when Castro took over Cuba, there ended religious freedom. Tell me about your religious experience in Cuba and what it is now.
My faith has always been strong. I've always been a Catholic. I believe deeply in God-- for me it's first. In Cuba, whether it was hidden or not, I always exercised my faith. Then I came here, where I have the freedom to worship and can go to my church. I can express myself religiously.

Has your faith helped you throughout your life?
My faith helps me a lot in my life. If it wasn't for my faith in God, I couldn't have persevered after the death of my husband. I'd be on the floor without the strength to go on.

You mentioned your husband's death. How long ago did he pass away?
Three years ago.

How many years were you married?
We'd just completed our fiftieth wedding anniversary.

My last question has to do with your concept of beauty.
I think that women should always strive to look beautiful. Even men strive to look good. To have your skin, hair and everything taken care of is a nice thing. It helps women, especially, when they have to go out into the workforce. She needs to present herself well with her wardrobe, her face, her form. All of this helps her get ahead. And, when you are well, your inner beauty comes through. If you are ugly but possess an inner beauty, then you'll always be seen as beautiful by others. This is a beauty of the soul. Beauty comes from within.

CAROLINA DeJESUS

Carolina DeJesus, immigrated to the United States in 1988 from the Dominican Republic. In her interview, conducted on October 17th, 1995 by Joan Kelley, Carolina talks about the difficulties of being a single-mother of three little children at age 17 and her plans for the future.

Carolina, will you tell me something about your very early life.

I was born in the Dominican Republic December 28, 1977. I was placed with my mom. My mom and father were separated. My mom had two more kids, Rayna and Johanne (sp?). My father remarried with another lady. She had no kids. My mom left the Dominican Republic and she came here. I was living then, with my grandmother and my brother; my sister was living with my father.

But you stayed with ...?

With my grandmother.

...in the Dominican Republic ...?

Yes.

...when your mom went to ...

Here. She came here, New York.

To New York?

Yeah. I had a rough time living because then my father actually came here, too, to New York and I was put in a private school and I was living there for a year and a half.

How old were you at the time?

I was like eight, seven, something like that, but I remember. I was not living with my brother because he was not my father's kid; he was from another man. And my father was here. He had a life over here, then we came. I came with my sister here in December 10, 1988.

But your father was living in New York?

Yes. Here. I mean my father was living in Lawrence. Then I was living with my father here in Lawrence; my mom was living in New York. I was going to school, the Robert Frost School.

In Lawrence.

In Lawrence. Then, you know, years pass and I got pregnant.

What grade were you in, Carolina, when you got pregnant?

I was in the eighth grade.

How old were you?

I was 15.

Fifteen?

Fifteen. My father didn't know that I was pregnant, so I was going for vacation to New York City and I was... When I got pregnant, I graduated from the eighth grade. I went to New York for a vacation. I was waiting for that because I knew that I was pregnant but my family didn't. I told my boyfriend that I was pregnant, that I was going to wait to go over there and to see what was going to happen. When I got there

to my mom's house, she saw me and when she saw me she said, "You're pregnant." I was like, "No. No. No. I'm not. I'm not. If you want to know, take me to the hospital. I'm not." I was denying it, but I knew that I was. My mom took me to the hospital to check myself. It came out positive. And I was, "No, that's wrong." You know, I did like three times and it came out positive and I was, "Okay. I am."

I was there for my daughter; I was living with my grandmother and my mom and I had- I was going to school, finishing my ninth grade; I did finish the ninth grade. My daughter was born. I was going to school. I had many friends there but it was not the same because I had like four years living in Lawrence, and, you know, to go to a new city that you don't know, it was hard for me to get along with the others. I used to crochet.

Crochet?

Crochet little booties and sell-I was selling them at school, you know, to get the money to buy some like underwear or whatever. I finished the ninth grade; I came here for a week to see my boyfriend and so I didn't know why I came back; I got pregnant again. When I left to New York; he used to call me and everything.

This is the same boyfriend?

Yes. The same boyfriend. He used to call me. He used to go for the weekends over there.

How old was he at the time? How much older is he than you, Carolina?

Right now, he's 30.

He's 30?

Yes.

And you are?

Seventeen.

Seventeen. So it's about a 14-year difference?

Yes.

Continue for me.

He wanted me to live with him over here but he argued with my father because he used to sell drugs. My father didn't want that for me, you know. That was the bad thing to do but he almost-there was-they were going to get in a fight. That was the first time I got pregnant but I didn't know about that because I used to get sick, bleed through my nose because I would get high blood pressure because of the problems that I had. Well, I had like almost two years that I don't talk to my father because of that.

The second time I got pregnant I was there in New York; I was with my mom, going to school. I had to drop out because I was going to come here to live here and I remember in November, the first, I had my first sonogram. I was nervous and the doctor told me, he asked me if I had somebody in my family that had twins. And I said, "No. Don't tell me. No. I know. Don't tell me." He said, "You're having twin girls." I was like, "No. It can't be." I was so surprised.

And how old were you at the time?

I was 16.

Sixteen?

Well that was November 1st. Four days later, I moved over here to Lawrence, living by myself. I had a rough time because I lived on the third floor, going down the stairs and when my daughter, she learned how to walk, she was nine months and I was after her with the big belly.

Where did you live in Lawrence?

I lived at 138 South Union Street when I came.

I'm going to ask you one question here, Carolina: why did you move back to Lawrence just before your twins were born?

I moved to Lawrence because New York is, I don't consider a nice place for a child to be raised in. You know? I was thinking about my kids to be raised in a nice city, not gangs, stuff like that, bad things. I didn't want that. I had to make the right choice. So I moved here and by surprise, November 30, my daughter was running around and everything. I was 7 months and I told my uncle that I wanted to go to the hospital because I didn't feel good. I was okay but I didn't feel good.

Well, when I got to the hospital, they had to take me to emergency because I was dehydrated and I was 5-cm open. They had to do cesarean section because one of the babies-the heart was beating slowly, I was dehydrated, I couldn't wait. I just couldn't stay in the hospital for two more months. The doctor was telling me-they were going to try to save one of the babies was sitting down so I was opening; I was like 5-cm, 6- and one of the babies was sitting down. So they had to do a cesarean section emergency.

When my daughters, my twins were born, I was sad because the same day they were born-that was like 7:25, a Friday in the afternoon, 7:27, and they took them to Boston for five days. I didn't see them-I was really sad because I...you know, seeing my daughter, my mother took my biggest one to New York and my twins were in Boston for five days.

When they brought them there to General Hospital, they-I couldn't believe that I had, you know, twins, two at the same time. I was like "God." But, you know, I was like going to the hospital every day, walking from 138 South Union Street to the General Hospital every day just to stay for an hour with them, with each of them. And I thought they were not going to stay alive because they were born, weighed four pounds each. But they were like over there for two weeks and then they came home. I was so glad because that was before Christmas and I had them home, you know, and my big one two hours like relieved that nothing was wrong with them.

But sometimes I look at them. You know I think what I was going to do before-when I got pregnant, because I was going to have an abortion. I made the appointment and everything and when I came out of that... the clinic, that I was going to have the abortion... when I made the appointment, I was crying. I couldn't. I don't believe in that, you know. And sometimes I look at them and I think about that, and I'm glad I didn't do it because they are so healthy now; they're ten months and they look so big, they're so pretty and my biggest one. It's tough for me because, you know, I live by myself. The baby's father, he left me. He didn't want to do nothing with them. I live on 46 Amesbury and, you know, I'm trying to get my GED to go to college to do something for myself, you know, to prove to my father and to myself, too, that I could do something. It doesn't matter if you got three kids, it don't matter how many kids you got. But you can do something you like. I'm only 17 but you know, I'm thinking what's the best for me.

Carolina, tell me about your parents: Were they married?

My father and my mom, they were never married. My father actually-he said to my mom that he was going to get a house and this and that-every man in the world say to the woman, but it never happened. She had two kids, my sister and myself with him and it never happened. He married again. He had two more kids.

He did marry?

Yeah. He did marry. He has three more kids. And my mom is...she married. She had one kid but she is now living by herself. She don't want to marry nobody. She's, you know, trying to get her education because she didn't graduate from high school. She got her GED too over here because of my father. You know, if she got with him and everything, you forget about everything in your life. You just think about the guy and that's it, but she has her GED. She didn't finish high school. You know, she's progressing. She's doing better, I guess. She likes my crying kids. And you know life is tough.

How old is your mom?

My mom is 40 now.

Was your mom on Welfare all this time?

No. My mom never...she hasn't been on Welfare. Everything, she works for. I'm not going to tell you that she has a nice house, but, you know, she worked for her money and everything, you know, because she says if you need it, you need it; but if you can work, you could work, you know what I mean? And she lives with my grandmother, you know, she trying to progress. Now she got her diploma in nursing and she is going to get a job. She's trying to move over here and I hope she does.

To Lawrence?

Yes. I didn't get along with my mom that much, but now that I have my kids, you know, you changed your mind. It's-

Can you figure out now why you and your mom didn't get along?

Yes. Because like I said when I came here, I was living with my father, and every time he gets mad (that's when I hate that), he would say something bad about my mom and every time I would cry because of that, because my mom is my mom. She had me. It don't matter, you know. And then when I used to visit her, I would like say bad things that my father would say and she...but now that I have my kids, I know what's the problem, what happened and we get along. She calls me every weekend. She comes over here and she visits me, but she is trying to move over here to stay closer to me.

How do you manage with three children? Who takes care of them when you're coming here to the Young Parents' Program?

It's hard. I'm going to tell you, it's really hard because, you know, I'm by myself, 17. I never thought I was going to have this. My hand's full but like I said, if you can do it, you could. You know, if you put yourself to do it, you can do it. My twins and my daughter, she's so healthy, you know. I have people like a nurse. She comes to my house for two hours and she helps me sometimes when I'm tired.

Once a week or?

Three times a week she comes. And that's a big help for me because she will say to me like, "Take a nap" and I'll get them food and everything. When it comes to take classes, this lady goes to my house and she takes care of my kids.

Is this a neighbor?

Yes. It's our friend. I'm glad they're in my house because you would think it was my kid, waking them up early in the morning so I don't have to wake them up. It's just my family coming over here and that's it.

And I know you're planning to get your GED and what do you plan to do after that?

Well, when I get my GED, I'm planning to go to Northern Essex to get some computer classes, something that will get me a start in my life. I'm not sure but that's what I'm hoping to do, to go to Northern Essex Community College and to progress in what I had in mind.

Are you happy now where you're living?

Well, yes. I'm happy now because see I've been through a lot and I feel like, you know, I'm by myself now and I feel much better because I just don't know how to explain it. I've been through a lot. It's like, you know, it's hard to do things.

Do you get out very much?

No. I do not go out.

Just to come here?

I just come here. If I have an appointment, I go to the appointment. I go to the park for my kids.

Which park?

It's a park over there. I don't know how to explain.

Near Hampshire Street?

Yes. And, you know, I play with them. I just don't go out. If my mother or my grandmother comes from New York, I don't go out either. I just spend that time with my mom or my grandma. I just don't-you know, if I have to go out for something, I just, I don't think that's a good idea. If you want to go out, okay, it's fine but I just don't...

And when you go shopping, do you take the three girls with you?

Well, sometimes. It depends because the babysitter, she stays in my house for 2 o'clock and if I have to do something, she'll stay there with the kids and I go by myself and then...

So you have until 2 o'clock to yourself every day.

Yes. But it's like...I come out of school at 12:30. If I have an appointment, I have to go there. It's like, my life is- I have something for every hour.

Like most people. Do you find it's hard with three children in the house?

It's hard. Yes. It is hard but what can I tell you?

What's the hardest part about it?

Well, the hardest part was-now I don't find it now that hard-when they were small, because when they came from the hospital, they wouldn't wake up. I had to wake them up; like I had to stay-like if they're like-I had to stay up all night because they wouldn't wake up because they...the doctor told me that they were not going to wake up. They would like sleep the whole day, the night. I had to feed them like every three hours, so I had to be on time, in three hours feed them because like they were seven months or two months early and therefore, like, they were in the stomach so it's not-I had to wake up every night, be on the time for their feeding. But now...

Now they're fine?

Yes. They eat too much.

Are the twins walking yet?

Yeah. They walk; if you hold them, they'll be walking. They crawl. If I go over there- probably in the kitchen cooking, because they don't like baby food every night, rice or meat-that's what they like, everything.

And they're eating that already.

Yes. They eat too much. That's what I tell to the doctor, they eat so much. They're ten months and they're 24 pounds each.

Each?

So it's like, wow. And my biggest one is 31 pounds and she's again eight months so.

Does she try to help?

Yeah. She's a good girl, you know. I see little kids; they'll be like doing bad things but she's like, if I tell her, mommy do this, go get mommy this -Pampers- she'll come and she gives it to me. If the baby spits up, she gets something; she wipes it up. So, she's helping. She's little but...

Do you find that you're Welfare check stretches enough to take care of the four of you?

No. It's not enough. That's when I- when I get my GED to get myself a job because let me tell you, that's not enough. I get \$668, \$400 up front. I got to buy diapers.

Is it \$400 over and above the \$668?

No. I get for a month, \$668. I got to pay \$400 of rent.

So that leaves you with?

\$234. I got to pay the bills. Let's say, everything is electric in my household. For this winter, I don't know what I'm going to do. So let's say it's \$150 with bills. I got to pay the phone. I got to pay the phone. I got to buy diapers. If the baby gets sick or something, I got to buy the medicine. I got to-you know, it's not enough. It's not enough. It's not enough.

What do you like best about living in Lawrence?

What I like best, it's quiet. It's not like New York City. It's quiet. It's nice people. You can walk in the night. You don't have to be worried about somebody hitting you or something, killing you, like in New York City and you can walk. There's a lot of nice people. There's a lot of opportunities over here than in other places. That's what I think.

Carolina, do you see your boyfriend, the father of your three children at all?

Well, the father of my three kids, I don't see him right now. I mean it has been a month ago that I saw him. He thinks that I'm not going to take him to court. He thinks because before I used to say, "Oh, yeah, I'm going to tell everything that I know about you." And he would say, "Yeah. Oh yeah. (This and that). I won't give you money." Like \$20 for diapers or something like that. He's 30, like I said.

Does he pay child support?

No. I am trying to get my date to go to court. I'm waiting for that but I guess it's not going to come. You know, I really, really want that to come because he's not taking part, you know, we were together as two people to make a baby, right? If he don't want to take part of nothing, he don't want to do nothing. You know, just...he has sex and that's it. He don't want to take no responsibility.

What is keeping you from going to court to get child support?

Well, the thing. I'm waiting for the letter they sent to for the date to go and I haven't had that.

Does he work?

He's not working.

Has he ever worked?

That I know? No. No. Yes. Yes. In a piece of thing but it's not a job. I don't consider that a job. Well, it's a job but, you know what I mean? It's not a job-job.

So where does he get his money?

Well, I was going to say this: that he used to sell drugs. I don't know if he's doing that, selling drugs. And I don't know. I don't want to do nothing with him.

You don't want to be involved in drugs?

No. I don't. That's why I'm planning to move from my house because, you know, he knows where I'm living now and I just don't want to, you know, I just don't want to deal with him no more, you know. When I was with him, I was like everything was going the wrong way, everything was wrong. But now that I'm by myself, I'm doing much better. I'm getting my GED, everything. I'm getting myself together.

He doesn't try to contact you very often then?

No. He's not calling, nothing.

Do you know where he lives?

Yes. And I gave that to the Welfare Office, that information, but I guess...

How does he feel about his little girls?

Well, at the beginning, the big one he knows, he says is his but the twins, he says sometimes that, he used to say that it was not his because they're white and he's dark- skin. But I think they're not supposed to get, you know, come out the same way as him. But I don't know. I don't want to get with him. I don't want him to get the kids. If I go to court, I'm going to-if I go to court, I'm going to tell the judge not to give him an opportunity to see them because he's not a father. To have a kid...

What else were you going to say about?

I was going to say that my ex-, my baby's father, he don't act like a mature man; he acts like a 13-year-old kid, not even that because now a 13-year-old kid acts more mature than he does.

What hopes do you have for your girls growing up in Lawrence?

Well, I hope that they'll go to school, get them involved in things...

Activities?

Yes. Like that when they're having they used to call Young Parents, no, not Young Parents-oh, my God, I forgot. It's about preventing pregnancy.

Preventing pregnancy?

Yes.

Was that at the Y?

No. That's in the library.

Has the Young Parents Program done a great deal for you?

Yes. I think it has because now I'm getting my GED. You know, now I have more friends than I used to.

That you've met here?

Yes. It's a nice program because you are involved with girls that they have the same problem you have. They have kids, young, and they want to get ahead in life.

Do you have many friends outside of...?

No. I do not. It's weird but I do not have friends. The only friends-the best friend that I have, she-every time I call her that I had a problem, she wouldn't-she was not there for me. Because sometimes I-you know you get sentimental and you like want somebody to hear you but she was never there. But sometimes if she has a problem, she calls me. And I got to deal with that too. But, no I don't.

Kind of a one-way friend?

Yeah. I don't have that many friends.

But your neighbors are good to you?

Well, yeah, but, I don't got that much neighbors either. Yeah, I have two neighbors that I talk to sometimes but not like conversations. If they pass by I say "Hi." but that's it.

But you feel as though you've got a future ahead of you?

Yes. I have a great future ahead of me, especially my kids, my GED, the Northern Essex Community College, I have to get a job, you know. There's a lot of nice things that I want to do now.

How soon will you get your OED?

Maybe by November, December. I'm getting my tests; if I pass them, I get them.

And then will you go right to work?

No. I was going to go to Northern Essex Community College because I wanted to take a course on computers and that's about it.

What I said about communication between the parents and the kids, that's...it has to be like that. You know, you got a choice, your kids, you have to have communication because the trust and the, you know, the communication that I had between my father, you know, it didn't work like that so I turned to my baby's father, you know, the trust and everything. If I wanted to say something to my father, I would have gone to my baby's father instead of my father. You know, that was the problem. That's why things happened.

JULIET BISTANY

Juliet Bistany, of Lebanese descent, shares her early memories of life in Lawrence giving a description of her neighborhood, her parents' jobs and life in the tenements. The interview was conducted on May 21, 1985 by Mary Blewett and is part of an Oral History Archives belonging to The Lawrence History Center.

Juliet, I understood that you had some reminiscences particularly of your mother and would you tell me something about her early life? When did she come to the United States? When was she born?

Okay. My mother was born in Lebanon in 1902 and she came to the United States in 1912. She was only 10 years old when she came with her father. He left his wife there: my grandfather left his wife there and my mother was the oldest. That's why she came with her father. And she had only one brother, a younger brother, and three younger sisters. No! As a matter of fact, at that time – 1912 – if I remember correctly, there was just the boy and two girls. What happened was my grandfather and she came over and then he went back and had another child. And died – I think he died either during World War I or directly thereafter because Lebanon was blockaded. It was part of the Ottoman Empire and it was blockaded in the Mediterranean by the British and the French. Much of the population starved to death – literally starved to death because of the blockade. And my grandfather was one of the victims. And so was my grandmother, as a matter of fact. And she left these small children there.

The children survived?

Yes, as a matter of fact, they did – even the baby survived. And my mother came – as I said, she was 10 – and stayed because she married my father. And this is a little shocking now, but she was only 13 when she married my father. And my grandfather was angry and didn't talk to her for several years and he talked to her just before he went back to Lebanon. He was angry because number one, she was so young; and number two, they eloped and my father was 18 and she was 13.

What did your grandfather do? What was his occupation?

I don't know. My mother never talked about it. The only thing my mother and father ever said about my grandfather was he was a very hard man. He never talked to your mother again.

Never?

He never talked to my mother again after she eloped with my father. She lost her first child. My mother lost seven children before she had my brother and then she had me by mistake. She lost her first child and got very, very ill and she could hardly walk but she still had to go down into the street to do shopping and stuff and she was only about 15. And he passed her in the street one day and the only thing she ever heard him say after was "Adele – my mother's name was Adele – is that really you?" And this is what my mother told me she said and that was all he ever said to her. So it was what he said.

Did you understand why she had so much trouble bearing children? Was it health related or?

Okay. It isn't that she had – well, ya, she had a lot of trouble even bearing children but the first two died from measles and diphtheria. One – I think one was a year old; one was two-and-a-half. So she lost two that way. Then subsequent children, there were difficulties. They didn't really readily have doctors in those days until she got to my brother, who survived. But she found going to work in a blizzard and they still got a midwife and she couldn't deliver. Something had happened to the pelvic area but that they didn't know about and she would deliver either stillborn etc. so she lost seven. It was, I guess, ignorance etc. They didn't know what to do. Now when my –

What part of Lawrence was she living in when she was having difficulties?

They – all of the Lebanese came to two sections of town. One was the lower section of Lawrence: it was right near the mills – the Pacific Mills actually. This is where she worked. They would live about one block away from the mill in these tenement houses. And it was Common Street, Valley Street, Hampshire Street, Amesbury Street, Franklin Street. Okay. They didn't live on Essex Street because Essex Street was our main street. That was the street where they had the businesses and then the next block over was the Pacific Mill but they lived on the streets right after Essex Street so it was down town.

Now as you went further up Hampshire Street, you got to the Irish section, okay? And that was Bradford Street and Haverhill Street and that was around St. Mary's Church – the Irish-Catholic church and that's where you found a lot of the Irish. Later on into the '20s the Lebanese started to push up that way and, indeed, they did as the Irish got out and went up to Tower Hill and Prospect Hill, the Lebanese took their tenements.

Then further up there was another Lebanese area called – on Oak Street, Chestnut Street, Elm Street and that's where the church was built. Our church is a Maronite Church. Subsequent churches were built there too: the Melkite Church eventually was built there as well. But not where my mother and father lived. They were closer to the mills.

I guess all the churches, all the Catholic churches anyway, tried to build around St. Mary's which was the original Catholic church up there. So all of the other churches just sort of took that area and followed along with it because congregated in one or two blocks was the Irish church, St. Mary's, the Portuguese Church Saints Peter and Paul, my mother's and father's church St. Anthony, another Lebanese church but it was Melkite and that's St. Joseph's, and further down Haverhill Street was St. Anne's and that was the French-Canadians. So they were really – all the Catholics were right down town, very close to the mill.

And all were separate ethnic churches?

Yes, they were. Gee, you said "ethnic" and so I'm thinking of more churches right down there: the Lithuanian church, St. Francis – that was across the street from the second house we moved to when I was 12. We moved away from the Pacific Mill and we went up three whole streets. So when I was 12 we moved to Concord Street which was a nice area. It was only three streets up and it was across the street from St. Francis and that was the Lithuanian church.

So you lived quite close to the Pacific Mills for a number of years as a child?

Well as a child I lived there for 12 years. Oh no, really, then three streets up. That's all it was so I lived there until I got married. Yes, I did, I lived there until I got married. I was down town. My dad had a grocery store right around the corner. See, dad never – my father never wanted to work for anybody. The Lebanese are merchants but my mother worked in the mills. Okay? She can go to the mills but he had a grocery store and I think he had it from the very beginning because I can remember him telling me about how tough it was getting started. He didn't know how to read and write English and that – at first, there were a lot of ethnic people going to the store and they just spoke Arabic etc. but into the '30s, more and more people would come in. It wasn't just ethnic and he was known as – to be a good butcher and so we got a lot of other people coming in too.

So your father was also Lebanese in background?

Yes.

Could you tell me something about him and his life?

Sure. Well, okay, you want to find out about the Lebanese community. My mom and dad are third cousins. In spite of that my grandfather was really angry when he married my mother. They associated at the beginning only among themselves, so much so that they did marry cousins which is a holdback – holdover from the old country where they live in one village and especially if there's land in the family

they like to keep it in the family and so it's almost like a tradition that you marry someone within the family.

Anyway she was actually a third cousin but from a different village in Lebanon and they met over here. She was –

They had not met in Lebanon?

No, they never – even though they were related. You know why they met here? Because when they got off the boat at Ellis Island, they all took the train and came even to Fall River or to Lawrence, Massachusetts because other people had come before them and had written back or sent money back and they knew they could get jobs in the mills. So they either went – at least my mother's side of the family even went to Fall River or to Lawrence. Now her first stop was – from Ellis Island they went to Fall River and apparently my grandfather didn't care for Fall River or maybe he had better friends or more relatives in Lawrence: I don't what the case was but they ended up in Lawrence.

And she told me when they first came in they lived with relatives and about 12 of them lived in one tenement and that's how she met my father. Not that he lived in that tenement – no. But he probably lived along the street someplace. And you know what she said to me – because she was only 13 – I don't know if I can say this, she said to me “You know, I hadn't even had my period” she said, okay? And he said to her, “Why don't you come and cook for me?” And she says, “I thought I was going to – but they went up the street and they went to the church and they got married.

That was the way he had expressed it?

Yes.

I was curious about what you thought your mother's motivation was to get married at 13. It's a young age.

I never really thought about motivations. I took her at her word that she said to me my father said to her “You can come live with me and cook for me” and that –

And she agreed?

And she agreed. Listen there could have been other dynamics in the family. Maybe her father was very harsh. I mean you got me thinking and she's gone now and I can't ask her and I'm sure she never told me everything because you just don't tell your daughter everything especially the old timers. There was a lot left unsaid and when they go, that's when you say to yourself, oh, I wish I had asked her so many other questions. And this is one of them now that you brought it up. I never really thought about it. I just accepted it at its face value because she was my mother and he was my father and I didn't want to ask her anything else.

Other people told me my grandfather was a very hard man and that could be the response for her going with my father instead. He may have been hard on her. I don't know what he –

Was it your impression that people married around 15, 14, was that?

That was very common.

It was very common.

It was extremely common. I don't know how common it was with the other ethnic groups but with the Lebanese they preferred to marry the girls off very young. They were taken care of that way.

So this was really a question of other choices that your father didn't approve of rather than the early age?

Well, I think 13 is rather young. I think 15, 16 was more common, okay? But I don't think it was all that unusual. And usually the father would approve of the marriage. Sometimes the girl – well the girl never had anything to say about it and I think what my mother did was certainly going against all of their values. I'm surprised that she did what she did because in those days I mean other girls never did that.

Do you think that she asked his consent and did not receive it?

I never asked her. I wish I had. Oh, do I wish I had. Also it could be America was so different that they thought – maybe my mother and my dad thought they could – I don't know – do something different. How do I know was in her mind or my dad's mind?

It's hard to say but we do know that she went into the mills at a very, early, early age.

Okay, I know more about that than I do or what – this is what she told me. She was only 10 and she came over here and they have very strict rules about these immigrants. This is 1912, Mary. Do you remember if they had passed immigration children's laws?

Child Labor Laws

They had.

14, yes, in Massachusetts.

Because she made this quite clear to me once that she was supposed to go to school. She was definitely supposed to go to school. There were 12 in a tenement and they were very extremely poor and so they said let's try to get her into the mills and say that she's 22 years old. So they took her down and – yes, my grandfather was working in the mills because he said to the super – this is – the superintendent – my mother always called him the “super” – “The super said to me” – okay – “you mean to tell me this girl is 22?” And my grandfather said, “Yes, she's 22.” He says, “I know you're lying but I'll take her anyway.” Yes, she did tell me that. So she started working in the mills at about 11.

What did she do?

She started – I don't know. I know my mother was a spinner all her life. She may have started spinning but they tell me spinning is one of the toughest jobs in the mills and if she was 11 and my mother was only 5'1”, I don't know if she started as a spinner. She may have started something else but she eventually became a spinner and stayed with it –

What do you remember about her work that she told you?

No, you know what? She tried to protect me an awful lot. The only thing I remember is that she said, “Juliet, you get an education. You never want to go into the mills.” And then as I grew older and I would pass the mills, I would pass them walking and in the summer time they would have the windows open. The racket that would come out of those mills, I said, my God, my mother's working in there? I couldn't even hear myself on the sidewalk let alone being in there working and it was continuous eight hours with the machines going all the time. I remember my mother coming home as I got older and I could stay up, she worked the shift 2:00 to 10:00 – 2:00 in the afternoon until 10:00 at night and when I got old enough that they would let me stay up and wait for her, maybe I was eight or nine, I remember the smell that she brought in with her. It was this oily gooky smell. You know, she only smelled like that when she came home from work on weekends. When, you know, she didn't have to go to work, she smelled beautiful because she liked to put powder on and stuff like that. But during the week she always had that oily smell. But I found out later on, I guess there was lot of oil in the mill. They had oils on the machines and stuff like that.

And the other thing I remember about her is, she always had yarn around her wrist and when I got old enough to ask why she wore this yarn, she said because spinning, you use your wrist a lot – I guess your hands and your wrist – and her wrist was always out – whatever happens I don't know with the bone or

something – so she would wind the yarn around her wrist to pull it back in so she can use it. And then she had these little tools – forks or something, little tools – that she always had in her black bag that she took to work and brought home. And that's what I remember about her work: that she was always away from her house.

See, when she wasn't working from 2:00 to 10:00 she was down at my father's store working in the morning. Before everything got modern, when I was a real little girl, we would sell chickens that were still alive and my father never liked to kill the chicken so when the customer came in and picked out the chicken they wanted, my mother would go down the morning before she went to work and killed the chickens and de-feathered the chickens. My dad never liked to do that. Dad didn't like to do too much hard work: mom did everything.

What time did she get up in the morning?

About 5:00, yes. She'd get – she'd get in about 10:00 and when we were really small, my brother and I. She would get in at 10:00 and do the housework say between 10:00 and midnight, go to bed and then get up at 5:00. Well she had to get up at 5:00 because besides doing more housework, she had to make a stew. Every day we'd have stew because she wouldn't be home to cook dinner. So it had to be something that could fit on the stove and something that we could go into whenever we had to eat. And so she'd get that going very early in the morning and that would be on the stove. Then she'd go down to my dad's store and do the chores down there, come back and get ready to go to work at 2:00. So the only time she had off would be Sundays. Saturdays she worked down the store all the time because that was the busy day down there.

And when did she do her housework?

As I said, when she came home and after 10:00 and before she left to go down to the store, she would do her cooking and her housework then. Then on Saturdays – Saturday nights is when I got a bath. My brother was eight years older than I but this is what I remember. He took care of himself when I started to remember but she took care of me and I got a bath every Saturday night in front of the stove. This great big tin bathtub and the rest of the week it was a cold water flat place.

When we moved up three streets, then we had steam heat and we had hot water but until I was 12, it was a cold-water tenement and we were on the fourth floor. And underneath us was Posternak and he was a kosher butcher: he was Jewish. Oh my ethnic neighborhood was marvelous. My mother always bought liver from the kosher butcher that was underneath our tenement house. There was a store front and then there were four flight tenements. We were on the very last.

Well she always bought – once a week she would buy raw liver and it being kosher she knew it would be fresh – freshly killed and the rabbi would have – you know, it was really – he'd make sure it was really clean and she would make sure that my brother and I would eat it raw so we'd have enough vitamins. Well what she said was "good blood" so you'd get good blood. And so I remember growing up eating raw liver but –

Was that for a meal or for like a supplement to the dinner?

This is a supplement because of diet. The meal was the stew. We always ate stew and rice except on Sundays once in a while one of the chickens would be left over in the store, we'd get a chicken. But –

.....

Did someone prepare the rice from –

No, my mother did.

She had everything set before she left?

Yes. I was – I guess – my brother Ray and I were latchkey kids before that became popular. As a matter of fact, I think most of us in the neighborhood were latchkey kids.

Yes.

Either that or like in my case I had a maiden aunt – my father's sister, my aunt Beebe would – she would go to the mills the first shift – what was it? 6:00 to 2:00? So when she came home at 2:00 she'd be – when I was really young, she'd be the one that would put me to bed and stuff like that. Like there's always a maiden aunt around and she always takes care of the brother's children, never the sister's children because the loyalty is on the boy's side. Once the sister gets married, she's over with her husband's side so even as I grew up my cousins on my other aunt's side we would always say Beebe took care of you and Ray. She would never take care of us – I mean there's no jealousy there but you see Beebe's loyalties went to her brother, not to her sister which is interesting. That's gone by now though.

Did your mother come from the store to make your lunch?

No.

Before she left for work?

No, that stew in the pot –

Was lunch and dinner.

Yes and if it was left over it would be lunch again. That stew would stay until we finished it. If it took two or three days, we ate it for two or three days. And my dad down in the store never made a sandwich. All I can remember is my mother saying "take your father's lunch" – she spoke to me in Arabic – I would answer in English. If she would speak to me now, I never wanted to speak Arabic – I never did until I grew older. I must have gotten it by osmosis but I never thought I could until I was older. I refused to speak Arabic. I hated it. But she would say to me in Arabic "Take your father's dinner down" and she'd wrap it in a paper bag. It would be a stew in her deep bowl and I would take it down and as a kid, you know, I'd got it all over me before I got it down to dad.

By the way, I started calling my father "dad" maybe in the fourth grade because I heard other kids say that. It used to be "Baba" - Baba, of course, meaning father in Lebanese. I just didn't want to speak it. Terrible.

When did your mother do her laundry?

I don't remember too much about the – ya, I do remember a lot about the laundry – what am I saying? Of course I do. I remember her heating the tub on the stove and then going into the bathroom where – it was a tin tub on the stove – no, no, it was something – something on the stove, a pot maybe. She had to heat the water, okay. Then they'd be this tin tub in the bath tub in the bathroom and I remember her throwing it – throwing the hot water over the clothes that were in there and then she had one of those scrubbing boards. She would scrub that and then she would take it out and hang it up on the line that was on the porch. That's what it was. When she did it - probably weekends, yes. I'm sure it was weekends. I mean there was no other way. I don't remember really. You know, I never did anything. She never had me or my brother do anything. Now we figured this out. This is unusual for Lebanese but we got it figured out. We figured seven children died and then she had us two, so she spoiled us rotten because I think we were an exception: both of us never did anything. Mom and dad never had us touch a thing. If we lifted something heavy, they'd come running and say "Don't. You'll hurt your back."

Protective.

Very, very, very protective, yes. So much so that people talked about it because I get it even now from my cousins. They say you're spoiled rotten. You never did a thing, you know. Your mother took care of everything and she did. She took care of my dad, my brother and myself: everything.

.....

What about your aunt. That's an unusual Lebanese name I should mention.

Now I don't think my family was a typical Lebanese family. My father was not authoritarian and most Lebanese fathers are. My husband, for instance, is very authoritarian. My father was laid back and very passive. My mother took over and when my brother, Ray, the boy in the family got old enough – and old enough means five years old – I'll tell you the truth, he was given the authority. So when I came along and I started to grow up, it was Ray that I feared, not my father because they gave him full rein to do whatever he wanted. He was eight when I was born and my mother had picked out a name for me. This is similar to my story. She was going to name me Maurice – I remember her telling me this. And she had me in the hospital because I was cesarean section. All the other children, no hospitals but my brother –

Home birth?

Yes, home birth.

With a midwife.

With a midwife and not a registered midwife or anything just somebody from the Lebanese community that would do this for them. They rarely went to see a male doctor. That was very rare but my mother got so sick that finally with my brother, Ray, she needed a doctor: it was obvious.

Anyway, she was in the hospital and she had my name picked out and my eight-year-old brother had been to school and he had indeed heard the story *Romeo and Juliet* and my father said your mother's going to name the baby girl Laurice and he said, no she's not. She's going to name her Juliet. And he went and he said, "Adele" he says "you have to name the girl Juliet because her brother wants her to be Juliet" and this is a true story. They listened to my brother Ray even when he was eight years old. Now as far as I can remember, my brother Ray never had any discipline. I just said my father was very passive. My mother was so happy that she had a son that lived even though she disciplined me quite well when she was around though – she never disciplined him, okay? And when I was growing up, she would be off in the mills or down the store and Ray would discipline me.

Remember I said to you I hated to speak Arabic because I didn't want to be different? You know I'd go off to school and speak English etc. – I come home. I remember this very distinctly. She was talking to me in Arabic and I was answering her in English and Ray was in the kitchen with us and he slapped me hard across the face. He said to me when your mother talks to you in Arabic, you answer her in Arabic. You see, kids don't forget things like that and that I remember quite distinctly. What else, let's see?

Who were your friends? Did you have any?

Oh God, I had a lot of friends because we lived one on top of the other side by side. Across the street I had two French-Canadians and in those days I mean they really – well I suppose there is a new wave of immigrants now but like they spoke with an accent and they were from Canada. Down the street were the Italians. The Italians were near the Common: they lived near the Common. Just before the Common were the Portuguese and then the Lebanese. And the Lebanese were mixed in quite heavily with the Jews.

I told you about Posternak down below. Across the street was Schwartz's bakery and that's where we got all our rolls every single morning. We would eat bagels and bulkie rolls, fresh out of the oven. And near Posternak was the Jewish grocery store and my mother did – even though we had a store she did a lot of shopping at the Jewish grocery store for stuff that she needed for soups and stuff that they only – only

they carried. Everybody had a specialty. Then we even had a Chinese grocery store right next door to us. And you know what? He was in the same building as the Greek gym. On top of the Chinese grocery store there was a Greek gym.

A gymnasium?

A gymnasium because only the Greeks would do this. I mean when I was growing up. This is – oh those Greeks are in the gym again. They – oh-h-h. Now this brings back Sparta and stuff like that. The other ethnic groups, yes, weren't so much into this gymnasium but the Greeks all went to their gymnasiums which by the way – I was in that tenement until I was 12, right? And I could look into their window and I can remember wanting to see what they looked like and I looked through my window but at night they always drew this black curtain and I couldn't see anything. I'd say, oh darn, they drew the curtain again. Terrible, wasn't it?

And let's see. You asked me about my friends. We played mostly in alleys and oh yes, listen some of my Lebanese girlfriends that I grew up with when I was really young shocked me because two of them when they were sophomores in high school left high school to marry two French boys and that was shocking. Usually the parents liked the Lebanese girls if they were going to marry at all to marry Lebanese boys – what I'm saying is that if they're going to marry young. The one thing that all of the families stressed was we don't want you working in the mills like we are. You must get an education. This was especially so for the boys. They worked and they saved very, very hard to put their sons through school. Now if they had enough money left over, the girls would go to college. High school was mandatory. You couldn't quit. When these two Lebanese girls quit in their sophomore year of high school, the whole neighborhood was scandalized. I remember that quite well. The girls had to have a high school education preferably with a business course so the girl would definitely become either a bookkeeper or a secretary. That was marvelous.

The boy would definitely go to college, preferably medicine, law because this is where prestige was. If they didn't go into medicine or law, they would become business men and yes, my generation, they're all doctors, lawyers or businessmen – everyone in that community. I can't remember one of my generation that went into the mills, not one.

But, I'll tell you quite frankly, after high school, I asked to go to college. I won a scholarship to a business school in Boston in high school from Lawrence High. I wanted to go to college. I had sent away to Regis and I had gotten my application for Regis. My father had left a brother in Lebanon and the brother had died at the age of 44 from a heart attack and had left a widow with three small children, two boys and a girl. The girl never got an education. My father periodically sent money over there for the boys to get an education. There wasn't enough money left over to send me to college and to send my cousin who was a boy in Lebanon to college and so he got the money that my father had. I do begrudge it, yes, I do. But I'm kind of glad, I'll tell you quite frankly. If they hadn't sent – he's a principal of a school there now. I don't know. They made a life for him and then he was the older one and then he put his brother through school and he became a school teacher as well. I'm kind of glad it wasn't me.

That's very generous.

Right now it is. I didn't feel like that at the beginning. I was very angry. I took the scholarship. I went to Boston and I did become a secretary. I did pretty well. I worked at AVCO but it really wasn't what I wanted to do. I was never that interested in typing and taking shorthand. I was interested in a lot of other things but I did what they wanted me to do. And as I say now we have two professionals over there and it worked out. I don't know what would have happened to them if it wasn't for my father.

But that's – a lot of Lebanese men sent a lot of money over there for that purpose. I think that they thought the education was the introduction into a better world, which it is, of course. And they wanted

the boys to have that opportunity. They always felt – and indeed I think they even vocalized, verbalized that the girl would get married and her husband would take care of her. She did not need the education although high school was mandatory, high school definitely. You didn't quit. You never quit school. A lot of the other ethnic groups quit school, you know. A lot of the French-Canadians quit school but it was rare to have a Lebanese quit school. Those two girls didn't do well at all.

One of the things you wanted to talk about was had to do with growing up around church.

Yes. Okay. Socializing took place in the church. Now I can remember growing up that every holiday was a huge event because there was a lot of planning to do. First of all, at Christmas time – that was very exciting because we always had a Christmas pageant. We called it the Christmas play. And when I was old enough to read lines, I was always in the Christmas play and our parish priest, Fr. David, would write the play and we'd perform it. And that was very exciting for us. And then whatever sweets that they made, that was exciting, you know. We'd go down into the church hall after the play and eat all these sweets and that was fun.

And then at Eastertime, they would have a – they'd color the eggs and we'd go down again into the church hall – everything was in the church – that was the only place that my mother would social- even there my father didn't go. My father did not go to the church. He never socialized with anybody. It was my mother that would take me. And at Eastertime we would have the game where you'd break the egg and see which one is stronger, right? We'd do that down that. That was exciting. Then right after Easter was May procession time and then at May procession time, the Sunday School teacher – oh, that was the other thing. We were there every Sunday for Sunday School. So that was socializing too. The mothers would wait and they'd talk and we'd have our Sunday School. Then they'd pick us up and go. So that was another way to socialize.

Then the May procession was every year you were in the May Procession until finally you were allowed to be a Queen and that was a big event. I was finally allowed to be a Queen when I was 13 and that was a big thing. I remember I was mortified. They gave me this long gown to wear and some of the other girls were always very fashionable but my mother always worked in the mills and in my father's store and she never paid too much attention to my clothes. I was always clean but I can remember thinking that I didn't have too many dresses in my wardrobe and that I wasn't too fashionable. Other girls were – anyway. I was going to be this Queen finally. I made it. I was 13 and this long gown you could see though it. And my mother put a short slip on me. And one of the snooty ladies looked at me and said "Oh you can see right through your dress. You should have worn a longer slip." I didn't even want to march in the May procession. I didn't. I cried but I had to march. I remember that. My poor mother.

I'd like to have you – if you want to – to describe the interior of the tenement where you lived. You talked about Saturday night bath night and how she heated water. Is there anything else you can remember looking across into the gymnasium. What else do you remember about living in a tenement?

Okay I can remember –

How was it heated for instance?

Okay, when I was really young, it was coal and wood because I remember my mother opening the top and throwing in the wood and it was so easy to get rid of garbage I remember that. We ate a lot of walnuts, Lebanese love walnuts and stuff like that, and the shells would go in there and everything. Then we graduated into one of these oil stoves and this was a huge – oh, when they brought it up four flights, it was amazing. It's amazing what they did in those days because we had a piano up there long time – a huge console – I don't know how they got it up – through the window that's what it was. Everything came through that window.

This huge oil stove had an oil can in the back. I guess it's five gallons. I don't know why five sticks in my mind but I think it was five gallons. I remember my mother toting that up all the time. And do you know what else? When I was old enough to know about Christmas and stockings, I'd go to school and I knew they hung stockings at the fireplace. I hung mine behind the stove at the oil can. And you know what we got in those stockings – I love to tell my kids – one orange, a couple of walnuts and 25 cents. That was my stocking and do you know I was thrilled. To get an orange in the wintertime – that was heaven. We didn't get oranges in the wintertime then. We only got things, you know, in season. There were no fast trains to bring them over. But I didn't miss it then it was just a big treat to get, an orange in my stocking, yes.

How was the wood and coal delivered?

Well I remember the ice truck delivering ice. I remember the ice box. I wish I had that ice box now, yes. Oh, the ice truck was a big event. The ice truck came down the street once a day, anyway. It had various stops. He certainly delivered to my dad's store which was right around the corner. Okay when he delivered to the stores, because there were a lot of stores there, he would be parked there for a good half hour delivering. That was when we had a ball. We'd jump in the back and this was just like the movies but it really happened. It was for real. We'd jump on the back and we'd sit there sucking on pieces of ice until he came out and then he chased us all away and we'd go back into the alleys. The alleys was Hollywood.

Can I tell you what took place in the alleys? Alleys – that was magic time for me. We'd come home from school. Auntie Beebe would be looking for me to give me milk and a sandwich. We'd hide. They'd tell "Hey Beebe's out. Beebe's out." Never called her Auntie Beebe. I call her Auntie Beebe now but in those days "Beebe. Beebe's out." Remember she was the old woman, right. Because with her I'd have to go home and get washed up and stuff. So the kids would warn me when she was coming by.

Anyway the alleys would be playing Relieve-io, Statues, 20 questions. It would be going up the street to the fish market and buying two crabs for a nickel and sitting on the stoop in the back and then eating the crabs and throwing the shells all around the place and then the adults would come out and say look what you've done there. There are flies all over here. Okay and then right in front of us all lined up were these rusty old barrels. Instead of putting them in the barrels they'd be all over the place. I loved those crabs. Those were wonderful and my mother telling me don't ever speak to strangers and never take money from someone you don't know.

And then I remember once going to the fish market. I was coming out with my crabs and this old drunk comes up. He says to me "Honey you want a nickel?" And I ran so fast. I thought this was the worst thing that could ever happen to me. My mother warned me about people like that.

You asked about the tenements. You know, I can almost – I can remember going up the four flights and I would open it. Go down a little hall and there was the kitchen and it was nighttime. We would put on the lights. The cockroaches would scurry all over the place. It was terrible. But mostly they congregated around the sink. It was this rusty old sink that went through the kitchen and they'd wait until the lights went down. I know. Listen you can't help it, you know. The cock – you could help cockroaches now but in those days it was very difficult to help.

Posternak was down stairs with all that meat and my mother would say "Oh, I want to- Joe" - my father's name was Joe – "Joe I want to move out of here just so I won't have any more cockroaches. I can't get rid of them because of the meat down stairs." That was the thing that stuck in my mind. My mother – and it's true. The meat market downstairs – you couldn't get rid of the cockroaches. It was terrible but I remember that.

I remember the rusty old porch out back when my mother hung up the line. I remember there were four flights up. I remember looking down all the time and she always had flowers on the porch and she had her – her prize possession was a fig tree. Now you can't grow fig trees in this climate. What she would do is she grew it in a tub that went out on the porch in June and came in at the end of August. And every year we got about three or four black figs that we could eat from my mother's fig tree. I've never been as successful as she was. But she always had them in these big tin cans. She'd have these flowers in these big tin cans. Some of it was some of the spices she'd use like basil. She would grow the small leaf basil out from the porch. That was their garden out there on the porch.

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You said that the Lebanese community was very small one in Lawrence.

Right in comparison to other ethnic groups there were very few Lebanese that did come over and so when they did come over they normally naturally gravitated towards their own kind and socialized within their own groups. And so that it wasn't unusual for their children to marry one another until about my age group. Then my age group was the group that started marrying outside of the – as a matter of fact wanted to marry outside of – so that it was unusual when I married my own kind when – you know, it just sort of turned itself around. And then after I got married, then it became very popular to be ethnic. Before that, we – the Lebanese community assimilated and wanted to assimilate. They didn't want to be different so they wanted to be very American and that's probably why I wanted to speak English. I didn't want to speak Arabic. Then there was a complete turnabout and they became very, very proud and wanted to know more about their ethnic beginnings etc. But I think that happened with most of the ethnic groups: the Italians etc.

ROSALIE HABEEB

Rosalie Habeeb, of Lebanese descent, shares her family story remembering her work in the Everett and Pacific Mills, the 1936 flood in Lawrence, the times during World War II and her work for the community. Juliet Bistany interviewed Rosalie on June 12, 1985.

Mrs. Habeeb, I understand you have a lot of memories of your parents who came over as immigrants from Lebanon. Would you like to share those memories with us?

I sure would! My father came from Lebanon at the age of fifteen because he heard there were opportunities in America were great. His mother came with him. Being the youngest of four children, she worried over him. She came here to make sure that he was properly cared for by relatives who came here in 1900. After six months, my grandmother got word that my grandfather was very ill. Knowing that my father was in good hands with his own relatives here, she went back and felt it was her duty to be with the other three children and her husband. She never came back; they all died, and I never had a grandparent that lived with us like we have today. The opportunities to enjoy the family; that's one thing I missed in life, you know.

So, your father was fifteen when he came here?

He came here at fifteen. When he was in Lebanon he used to drive a horse and buggy as a taxi from Beirut to anywhere where anyone wanted to go, and he felt that there was no future for him, just, you know, being a taxi driver so, he decided, the best thing for him to do was to come to this country and seek a fortune he thought he would make.

Why did he choose the Lawrence area?

Because all my other relatives came before him in 1900- dad came in 1905 -so they were here five years before him. My uncle, who came here first in 1900, told us that that year the Lawrence High School was being built.

Oh, that was....

Yeah! And he worked. He didn't know how to read or write, and he became a section hand in the mill, and he had seventy-five people working for him. They liked him so well that they had a bookkeeper to do all the bookkeeping or talk to the people. They had an idea, you know, because he couldn't read or write - and they wouldn't let him go- and they really kept him in the mill which is unusual, you know, because they can't read and write they don't...

Yes. A section hand?

Yeah! You don't get into that position... Well anyway, my father in 1912... No. Two years later my mother came; and the way they lived in those days so that they could pay the rent - even though it was a small rent like three dollars maybe a week - my uncles and my father and a couple of his friends lived in one apartment, and my mother and her cousins and her friends lived above them. So, my father and mother knew each other in Lebanon. So when she came out here and he realized he was in love with her they got married, I think it was in 1911. And then in 1912 they had the strike.

.....

What street did they live on?

On Elm Street.

They came and....

They all lived on Elm street, all the Lebanese people. And, like I said, nobody had an apartment by themselves because they couldn't afford it. When they came there they were also sleeping in.... Well there were three bedrooms, like, you know, and every two slept in a bed; so there are six people.

I see.

And I was born in 1913. And, of course, when the strike started dad had no job so....

Before that, was he working in the mill?

Yes, he was.

What mill was he working in?

I think it was in the Acadia. I'm not sure- either the Acadia or the Pacific- those are the two that he was working at.

Do you know what position he was in? Your uncle, you say, was a section hand.

My uncle, yeah. No, my father worked on cotton - I don't know, really honey - on the looms, I think. I'm not sure.

OK. Fine.

Anyway when the strike came, my father. . . . I remember my father telling me that they were all out there to see what was going on - whether they could go back to work, or not - and they noticed that they had got in the militia and they had bayonets; and there was a lot of pushing in those days, you know. They wanted to see what was going on. And four men ahead of my dad, was a friend of my fathers, and he got pushed and he went right into the bayonet and was killed.

What a tragedy!

And that, of course, hurt my father very much. So he decided, well, he was going to go and he went to the Boston Restaurant on Essex Street. I think that was in the area where A. B. Sutherland's later on built their place.

Oh, he left the mill, then?

He left the mill because it was on strike anyways. He said: "I'm going to go out and I'm going to look for something."

Did he tell you more about the strike? Did he tell you how it started?

Well, he thought that the communists wanted to have a union here and try to take over and make it a communist country, you know, as far as the work, and my father said that it was through them that caused all of this.

Oh well. They weren't local people, or....

I don't think so. No. I think they were brought in by someone. I'm not sure of that part, because I don't think my father would have known anyway, you know. So, I don't know when the strike ended. All I know is that dad started washing dishes at the restaurant and he wasn't making enough money, because now there are... I was the only child for four years before my brother was born. Then he decided he was going to go to Pawtucket, Rhode Island first. He went to Pawtucket, Rhode Island. My mother got sick and the doctor said to her, "You need an operation." So she said, "George, I don't know anybody here. I want to go back to Lawrence. If I'm going to be operated on I want to be among my people." So dad and mama moved back. And this Lebanese doctor my mother went to, he says, "Who told you need an operation?" She says, "My doctor in Pawtucket."

.....

The doctor says to my mother, "That dope," he says, "You're pregnant." Don't do anything about it. That's when Mitchell was born, my brother.

.....

Can you tell me, was he born at home or in the hospital?

All of them were born at home. No hospitals.

.....

How about you? Where were you born?

I was born on Jackson Street, and the doctor came.

.....

She had doctors that would come to the house?

Would come to the house. And when I was a breech, and, of course, my feet came first, so he had to push me back and he twisted my leg., and, you know what he did? He took a shoe box and make like a cast and fixed it for me and I was like that for about a month until my leg gets straight.

That's incredible that he did that.

Imagine that.

Right at the house?

Yeah. That's what he did, and then my father says, "Well, I think I'll be an ice man ." So he started delivering ice. Now we had My second brother came and my third brother came.

And your father was an ice man.

In the meantime... No. Ice man, at first. So he thought, "Well this is no way, I can't make enough money, I'm going to go back to the mill." So he went to the Acadia Mill on Broadway, that area, and he worked there, and he worked for about, I don't know how many years, and then, all of a sudden we were seven children and it got to be too much. So he said. . . . And he used to work nights, like, you know, he took two jobs. He went to the Acadia in the morning, got his supper on the way home, and went to the Pacific. He didn't want to take any welfare. In fact, he was offered by the man where we buy our food He had said to him, "George, I can get you some food from the town. You won't have to worry." And my father say to him, "Are you afraid that I'm not going to pay my bill?" He said, "Oh no, you can have the whole store. I would never say no to you, but I thought it would give you a break." He says, "No." So when he came home and told my mother, he says, "I'm going to work two jobs. I don't want any charity". So, for about two months... no, a month or two... I'm not sure... my father slept only on Sundays.

God bless him! Oh Rosalie!

And then, one of our friends opened up a bakery and he asked my dad and my dad said: "I don't know anything about baking". He said, "Well, I'll teach you". So he taught him and, at that time, he was paying my father twenty-five dollars a week plus all the bread you could eat, and we were like ten people, so, naturally, that came in handy - the bread. My father took the job; but, in those days, the ovens were heated by wood. It wasn't, you know, logs... It wasn't... No machinery, nothing. The mixer was there, yes, and then it had a machine that would cut the bread so that they would be even into small rolls. And my dad would pass it through a flat machine to flatten it. And then he put it to rise a little bit, but all the baking was done... They put it on a board, like, you know, I don't know what they call that, and he put them in the oven. By the time he put in the whole dozen, the first four were ready to come out. So my

father was really working very fast, and he'd come home and under his arms would be so raw from the sweat and the heat and all that.

He worked alone? He had no help?

No. The help that he had are the people who are packaging the bread. But nobody else could get near the oven. It's a one-man job. He did that for, I think it was about twenty-five years, and, in fact, one of his legs got an inch shorter from, you know, going forward. He'd raise the left leg to put the bread into the oven.

Oh. To put the dough into the oven.

So my brothers of course, were now all older. We'd go to work, we all worked, and we'd come home and we'd put the pay envelope on the table. We never opened it, and we were more than happy to give it all to our parents.

Did you get an allowance?

We got an allowance and half the time, when I used to get my allowance, I would go down to the Five & Ten at the time and I would pick up a fork and knife and spoon. And I made a set of twelve for my mother. And they were only like ten or fifteen cents each. But I wanted something new that we could use on Sundays.

You were the oldest in the family.

I'm the oldest.

Did you get a lot of responsibility being the oldest?

A lot. My mother made sure that I knew everything about cooking. I took care of my brothers and my sisters. Now, they were all born at home. I washed the diapers. I took care of my mother. I made the meals, but I still went to school. There was no problem there. My father was just as handy. He used to help in everything. And, thank God mama was a very healthy woman up to the war when my brother went in. I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Anyway, my brothers were working in the shipyard. My sister worked in the Navy shipyard.

This is World War II.

World War II.

World War I. Your father...

No, no. They didn't take him because he was married and had the children.

I see. I see.

So, my brothers were called and they all went. My brothers met each other in Europe, which was unusual. We had a write-up about it. And they promised dad that the day they came back he was to leave his job and retire; and he did. Thank God my three brothers came back home. My mother worried so much about them that she got a heart condition. And this is what killed her. You know, in 1951 she died.

Right.

My brothers came home. They said, "Dad, you are going to stay with us now. We'll take care of you." And they lived all together, even my married sister and my married brothers stayed for a while with my parents until two children came and they had to get out. My sister and two of my brothers stayed with him. Everybody else was married and they moved out. They took care of my dad. They made sure all the bills were paid. He got spending money every week. He had nothing to worry about. They bought all his clothes, his cigars, and whatever. And he was very happy. Before mama died, and every time from the day I got married which was 1938, I made sure that every time we went on vacation yearly, we would

take mama and dad with us. And, dad worked hard. Mama was working hard. He wouldn't let her go out and work because she couldn't. She had too many children.

It was seven in all?

We were seven in all. We lost a brother in 1932. He was only four and a half years old.

.....

What else was I going to say now?

While I was growing up on Elm Street there was a big big fire. I think it was in the early twenties, I'm not sure, because I was too young. I remember. . . . While I was growing up, I think I must have been about maybe six or seven years old, I don't know, there was a big, big fire on Elm street, and I think it was a double three-decker, and a friend of my dads and his son were leaving for Lebanon that week . They were packed and everything, and the fire started, and they came down, thinking that they were going out of the building, and they made an error and took the cellar door, and they found them dead in the cellar. They lost quite a few people, maybe two or three families, I'm not sure. That I can't remember. But I do remember standing there. The hydrants froze. They couldn't get the water. The snow was so high that the fire engines couldn't get through. And another incident that I recall: The stables on Bennington street. . . . Now they had horses there, and there was a fire there, and the horses - some of them got burned. And at that time that they had horses - they didn't have the regular cars for fire engines -they had horse-drawn fire engines. I took my little brother. At that time I was living on Basswood Street, and all my family was born, all my brothers and sisters were born in that one house.

.....

So, I took my brother who was only, at that time I think, three or four years old and I ran with him and we were playing in the playgrounds across from the Tarbox School. I leave there and I take my brother. And my mother and father have a fit because they didn't know what happened. They heard the commotion, and all that, and they say you know the horses could have gone wild and they could have run you over. Well, we didn't think of that.

Children don't.

No. We didn't think of that. So that was one incident. Then we had another incident that happened after I grew up. I wasn't married yet, and that was in '36. I had worked in the Pacific Mills for a curtain company and previous to that I worked in the Pilot Radio at the Everett Mills. They closed down. I was the type of a person no matter where I worked everything closed down. I worked in the Boston Store. That's where Sears Roebuck is, you know, now.

Oh that was the name of a store? Boston Store

Boston Store. They were closing up at the time but I worked for the sale. I was only sixteen then, you know.

You were a salesgirl?

I was a salesgirl. They had a big sale. They were going out of business. I didn't cause that one! And then I went to the Everett Mills and the Pilot Radio, They went out of business. I was sending parts to... They used to put the radio together, and I made sure they had pigeon holes in every... You take one from each and you pack it. (They showed you how.) Many times they were sending some to Beirut, Saudi Arabia, all this. It was interesting job. Well they went out of business. Then I ended up going to the Pacific Mills and I got hired on curtains. I knew nothing about sewing. I kind of lied my way in. And later on they told me they knew I was lying but they figured I needed the job. So they gave it to me. Now, they went out of business. So when they were going out of business I asked my boss, I say, "Could I buy a ruffler. I'd like

to go into this business." And he says, "Yeah, my father sells them in Boston. I say, "OK." I took the address and I went there. I bought the machine. I bought some material. I cashed in an insurance policy, which was at that time only a hundred dollars, and that's what I did. With that hundred dollars I started the business.

What year was that?

'36. I came home... I went in on a Monday or a Tuesday and that Friday we had the flood in Lawrence. My machines couldn't come through.

That was the 1936 flood. That was a famous one.

That was the 1936 flood and it was really, really bad. We really were frightened, and they were afraid that the falls....where the falls is, there's a bridge, that it was going to give... you know the power of the falls. But it never did. They had those freight trains loaded with coal and they were weighing down.

The bridge?

The water went all the way up on Essex Street. A lot of the stores lost a lot of money because if they had downstairs, the clothes were all gone. We lived further up so it didn't. ...

Where did you live at that time?

On Basswood Street.

.....

No. I was on Saratoga. I'm sorry. We were on Saratoga because the man who bought our house had relatives and finely we had to move out. Well anyway, I came home and I say to my mother, "Oh my goodness, Ma!" I say "The machines are on the way. I won't be able to get them till next week." Well, I got the machines. I started in the house and my mother had a lovely living room. There was my machine in the sun parlor, but the material was all over the place. So I bought the first... it wasn't a bolt, it used to come in remnant pieces, but each one had a different color, and I was able to make the body of the curtain. I bought the plain to make the ruffle. Well I made enough money to buy two, and the two made enough money for me to buy three at a time. Well this is how it started. So my mother said to me, "Why don't you take that little store there on Lawrence Street right across from the church?" and she said, "Rose, the people coming here at all hours and my living room is a mess". I said, "You're right, Ma. I think we should do that".

Rosalie, were you married at the time?

No, no. That's when I met my husband. He used to come over...

.....

Well, anyway, the machines came in and I used them and I was so happy. Oh God! Now I don't have to go looking for a job because, you know, it was hard in those days to find anything.

Oh yeah. That was in the middle of the Depression.

Oh yes. I went through the Depression. I opened up the shop and I used to go by the gas station quite a bit to go to the movies with my girlfriend and my husband... now my husband. At that time Pete would say, "Hi, girls. How are you?" and I thought all the time that he had an eye for my girlfriend. I didn't know, you know?!

.....

Yeah! So he said... He followed me one night. You know, I was coming home and I dropped her off at the house and I was walking. We had no cars. And all of a sudden, this car stopped and of course, now I know him, so I get in the car and I say to myself: "Well, if Pete cared for Emily he wouldn't be taking me home. What is he doing?" Then I thought... then I knew. Well, he says, "Where is your shop?" I wouldn't tell him, because I say: "You know, my father and mother will have a fit, you know." I was always afraid that dad didn't want me to get married. Too young. Well, anyway, to make a long story short, he came over to the shop. That's when he found out. I had seen him at a wedding and we were all together at a table and he asked me where my shop was. He was pretty smart. He knew I would never refuse him in front of people.

.....

So when in '38 we had a hurricane. Oh, I missed one thing. I always stayed in business a short time because my uncle wrote to my father and he says to him, "Please I have a nightclub here and I can use the boys and there's a restaurant connected with it. You could help me, uncle." And that was his only living relative here, so my father says, "OK." We all moved to Carolina, you know.

.....

Goldsboro, North Carolina. I was what? Twenty-five? I was going out with Pete.

And how did you feel about moving?

Well I was hurt a little bit, you know. And then anyway, Pete decided that He'd go out there. We got married in Goldsboro.

.....

He followed me out there. We got married, and we came back. After that, my father and mother moved back. They couldn't stay without us. So that whole family came back. In '40, I think it was in '40 my family came back. . But in '38 we had the hurricane before I left. Oh a wicked hurricane.

.....

Tell me, did you all go to Lawrence High School?

I went to Lawrence High, yes. They all did. But my youngest sisters, when we were in Carolina, they had high school there. But we all went to Lawrence High.

Before that, where'd you start first grade.

St. Rita's. And then I went to the Tarbox on the fifth grade.

They were Notre Dame nuns at both schools?

Yes, because I marched in the May procession when Father O'Reiley was living and at that time all the churches marched together. It was beautiful. But now it's cut down. Each one has their own. It got too big, I guess.

In other words, all the Catholic churches downtown Lawrence. . . .

St. Anthony's, St. Joseph's, St. Mary's, St. Rita's - not south Lawrence. No, I'm talking about this area.

.....

Yeah ... I remember about Lawrence High - it amazes me today- we were not allowed to use lipstick. We were not allowed to use nail polish.

How strict!

Very strict. At St. Rita's I loved the nuns and I've always believed in going to Catholic schools, but they were so strict. We used to wear aprons that crisscrossed on the back with a snap here in school.

Oh, like uniforms?

Yeah, over our clothes. Why, I don't know. And then when we're asked to sit forward with our elbows on the desk which gave me round shoulders. I'll tell you the truth. So they were so strict they would say, "I don't want you girls to move from your seats. Now, everybody stay still." Me, like a dam fool- my thing snapped off- so let it snap! I stood up to hook them on because I had to stand up to get it. She kept me after school. And what do you think she did to me? You know the ruler with the metal edge? I got ten of them on each hand. I came home with blisters. For what? What did I do? ... And I was so upset, I say to my mother, "You know, Ma, when I get through, I'm not going to St. Mary's. I'm going to go to the Tarbox School." They went a little too much. Now they are a little bit too lenient. You know! It's one extreme to another.

.....

Tell me, why do you suppose so many of the Lebanese became doctors and lawyers?

Well like I said, they were prejudiced. Did I mention to you that they used to....

No. Why don't you tell me about this?

When the people were going to work, they had to cross the Common to get to the Everett Mill. That was a short cut.

You mean the Lebanese?

The Lebanese men or women. The Irish hated them and they hated the Italians. And as they went by... my father didn't work in that area but he knew about it... they would throw eggs at them and they would throw tomatoes, and they'd say: "You camel riders." to the Lebanese. "Go back to your country and you "dagons" go back to Italy." All right? So they came prepared the next day. . . .Whether they had soup in their pails or whether they had lentil - the way we make it... and when they threw the eggs at them they threw the soup. Well, finally they got together and before you know it, they were living very, very close, and they all intermarried. And I think what the older people wanted to do is to prove that: "I'm just as good as you are. You weren't born here and neither was I." And that was what really did it. We are not prejudiced. We are the type of people who love to get along with everybody and we lived among a lot of French people.

.....

And your children have done very well.

My children have done well, thank God. My son married a girl from Florida. She's Greek and Spanish, and my other son married a Lebanese girl who was a principal at the school here, at the grammar school, and my both sons were hairdressers. They did very well. My daughter-in-law is in the real estate business, she's done excellent.

.....

And then, I'll tell you what. We have three grandchildren, thank God. And I sold an eight-room house that I was crazy about because my son said, "Mama, lets all live together. I can't live without you people. I

don't want to worry about you. I don't want Dad to be doing any snow blowing. I don't want him to cut lawns." I said, "Well, gee, I'm still young." Now I'm talking I was still sixty-six.

That is young!

I said: "'You know, Bob, I took a hundred-year old home. I designed it and did it over. I got it to exactly what I want now.'" He says, "Mama, what's more important, the three children and I or the material things in life?" I said, "Well, you are." He said, "Well then, prove it." I sold my home and now we all live together. We all eat together. We don't live, like in sections - different parts. No. the whole house is for everybody.

Well, that's wonderful.

And we have seventeen rooms, and we're eight people. [My daughter-in-law's] mother lives here too, with us. So now that I sold my home and I'm living with my son, we never went on a real good vacation to say, for relaxation. When we went with my mother and father we took them to visit our relatives in Carolina because that's where they enjoyed themselves. Actually, not that I want to praise myself but it was more a vacation for them than us. Five years ago when we sold the house.

The first year we didn't leave because we had to do a lot of work here. And I built a kitchen downstairs because I'm in the Arabic pastry business, and I got everything ready and then Pete, my husband and I, decided we would go away for three months a year... for the winter months...get away from the cold. And by moving in with our son were able to spend those three months in Florida where [before] we can't leave a home three months unattended.

That's right.

So we benefited by it. We enjoyed the children. Sometimes the music is loud, but we tell them, "Cut it down." Their friends we have almost every night, if it isn't the daughter it's the two boys that have their friends over for supper. We always have company for supper and we love it. Our son comes in from work and I know that the minute he looks at us that he knows that we're here with him, he has nothing to worry about. You can see the satisfaction in his face. It's worth it! The only thing I feel that I miss is being the boss of the house. But I don't care.

I think you got a wonderful life with your family.

I do. I really enjoy it, honey.

Rosalie, I know that you're a member of several organizations. The Daughters of St. Joseph - you're on the board of trustees of St. Joseph's Church; the Community Center; and the Council at St. Joseph's. But you are also on the board of the Cedar's Home for the Lebanese elderly, and I think that is so interesting. Could you tell us from the inception of the project right on through?

N. Well I'll tell you what happened. Mike Sabbagh always had a dream. . . .he belongs to St. Joseph 's. ...that he would like to see all the older Lebanese people together in one area in their old age, and as their children visited and their grandchildren, the other members of our community also would see these people and they would get together more and they wouldn't be... Now when they took over Elm and Oak street, there's no more Lebanese there. Everybody is so far away. If you don't have a car and you don't drive, you don't see anybody. But if all of you are in one area and your family comes up, you're bound to see Mrs. So-and-so's son is here, "Let's go see him." Whatever! Well, it took a while. Father Ferris said to him, "Don't give it up. Even if the government says, 'No'. Try again. Keep trying. This is a good idea and keep it up."

.....

The three churches sponsored this project and then the government said OK. If the three churches are able to do it, we are going to give it to you. We asked for sixty unitsThey gave us forty. We asked for two bedrooms. They say, "No, one." We asked for a little bit larger. They said, "No. This is the size we want you to build." So out of----- We got forty out of the whole thing, with the understanding there would be three or four for people who are disabled. In fact, we have one girl that's blind there. And everybody can get in there. Not only the Lebanese. We built it, but if an Irishman, a Jew, a black man, anybody. OK Well, this is fine with us. We don't care, as long as we get some of our people in. We worked so hard for it and we put our notice in the three churches that if they would like to come up and sign. Well some they didn't accept because they're really not qualified.

Low income?

Low income. Yeah, you pay because it is government funded. They decided, well, all right, the best thing to do now is: We'll go through the applications and we'll see what's what. They called us in, and we went in. We looked over the applications and they phased them I, II and III - 1. These people should be in here. 2. Well, there's a possibility if this one don't take it. 3. Forget it, because we don't think they're going to get in. Out of forty, I think we have five Lebanese people.

Oh. It's all filled up but you only have five Lebanese people.

The first thing they [the applicants] say: "Oh, we have an eight room house and the place is too small. What am I going to do with my furniture?" I had an eight room house. I got rid of some of my furniture.

I see, then it isn't so much that you're keeping them out, it's they don't want to come in.

They didn't want to come in, but after they saw them and people moved in and they were furnished, they kept calling me up. "Do you think you can get me in?" I say, "I'm sorry. I'll put your name down. You should have taken it when we asked you to."

That's true. Isn't that amazing?

Then the next thing we heard: We got a citation that it was the best building; the way it was built, the way it was run, and the whole thing. And this is something they have never done before.

THOMAS AND VICTORIA KATTAR

Thomas and Victoria Kattar both of Lebanese descent share their family stories; telling about their lives in Lawrence during World War II and the Great Depression. Juliet Bistany interviewed them on July 22, 1985.

Tom, you have some memories from what your parents told you about their coming over from the old country -from Lebanon. Can you tell me when they came over and why?

My father came over in 1911. He had come over from Lebanon because of the incident that happened in Lebanon. He was on the outpost with one of the soldiers and there were four Dru's who were smuggling arms from Syria into Lebanon. And my father was in the Turkish Army. He was on the outpost there and he stopped them. The soldier that was with him ran away because he was afraid of it being his own countrymen, you see. So, my father stopped them and he said, "Now I want to see what you have over there on the horseback." So, they said, "No, you won't." He said, "Yes, I will." He said, "If anybody tries to stop me, I'm going to shoot them." So, one of the men advanced toward him and he shot him. And, the other ones, he took in. Then, his father (my grandfather) and some of the men got together and shipped my father to the States because the Dru's were after him for killing one of their men. So, he came over here and he worked in the silk factory on Canal Street. He worked there.

Do you know the name of the factory, Tom?

I think it's the Pacific Silk Factory or something like that -Pacific Mills. They had silk at that time and then the cotton mill and then the woolen mill. So, he was making, at that time, \$3.25 a week working 70 hours a week.

.....

Why did he come to Lawrence from Lebanon? When they got up enough money to send him to the United States, what made him come to Lawrence per se?

Well, he had relatives in Lawrence. They had come before.

Oh, from the same hometown?

And his brother-in-law was here, too -David.

David Williams?

Yes. His brother-in-law, David, was here. He had come before my father.

Oh, my goodness. So, this was in 1911?

Yes.

Then he was here before the 1912 Strike?

Yes.

Was he working in the mills when they had the 1912 Strike? Do you know?

Well, he wasn't working in the mill. I mean, he was working in the mill but not in that mill where they had the strike.

Did he ever talk about how times were during the strike?

It was very hard times. He talked about it. Of course he talked about it. We were growing up and he was telling us the stories about what happened during the strike where the people on horseback were hitting the men and the women with the clubs, chasing them away.

And, when did he send for his wife - your mother? When did she come?

Well after he felt he was secured, she came after 1912-right after the strike. She came over here. We lived at 115 Valley Street.

Is that where you were born?

Yes.

You were born there?

Yes.

Tell me a little bit about what you remember about the neighborhood.

The neighborhood. Well, we had all kinds of neighborhoods - the Polish, the Jewish, Portuguese and so forth. And mostly Lebanese were on Valley Street. They had Valley Street, Oak Street and Elm Street were mostly Lebanese people. We grew up on Valley Street. I was born in 1915 at 115 Valley Street. That's where Schwartz's Bakery was.

.....

Did your mother work in the mills, Tom?

Yes. She worked in the Ayer Mill. She worked there until they went out and moved to the South.

Oh. What year did she start? As soon as she came over?

Well, she started within - I don't know what year she started there. I know she worked in the mill and in 1930, there was a depression and she used to go out picking blueberries. And my sister, George and I would go up to Tower Hill and sell blueberries. That's how we made our living - selling blueberries. Every morning at about 5:00, they'd get up. Mr. James Saffie used to take them with the truck. And, he'd take them down to Londonderry -no, not Londonderry. I mean, Lowell Junction. And they'd go into the field there and they'd stay all day picking blueberries. They'd take their lunch with them and they'd stay there all day picking blueberries. They would come home with a pail full -about 14 quarts to a pail. And she'd say, "All right Tommy, you take your brother and let's go sell blueberries. And make sure you have the right money when you come back because I know how many quarts there are in that pail."

.....

Did your father still work in the mill?

Yes. He worked in the Washington Mill at that time. And he had a barbershop also, which he bought from his brother. He'd work at the mill and then he'd come and work at the barbershop. He'd have somebody else work in the barbershop daytime and at night; he'd come and close up. He'd work there and then he would close up. In the meantime, my mother would go picking blueberries.

She didn't work in the mill during the Depression?

No. She was laid off. And then, we would go up there. And one day, my sister Mary said, "Gee, Tommy, I'm hungry." So, we'd go to the Tower Hill Bakery. They were making donuts at that time. We got a big bag of donuts for twenty cents- all loaded with donuts. I said, "Okay, Mary, here." My mother came in and she said, "Hey, you're twenty cents short." That's the truth. "What happened?" So, I told her. She said, "Oh, okay. As long as it's for something to eat and so forth, it's all right. Okay." But, we were selling blueberries. Going up to Tower Hill beating everybody up there.

Tommy, you were born, you said in 1915?

Yes.

Where were you born - in the hospital, a house, or...?

A house.

Oh, he did come to the house and deliver you then. Your mother never had a midwife?

No. No. Peter had a midwife.

Oh, that was the baby in the family. What year was Peter born?

1930.

.....

Okay, to get back to when you were born -when you started the 1st Grade, did you speak English?

No, I didn't speak English.

Really.

No, I was in the 1st Grade at the Franklin Street School and we had another one with me going to the 1st Grade that was Mitchell's cousin, Mounira. She went to the old country after that. She was there for one year and then she went to the old country. I had Miss Finnegan for the 1st Grade, Miss Holton in the 2nd and 3rd Grade, I think. Then I was transferred from the 3rd Grade to the Warren Street School. Instead of going to the Cross Street School -you know the General Donovan School. It was right near the home. We had to travel three or four miles to go to the Warren Street School, which was way up Tower Hill.

You had to walk?

We had to walk -my brother and I and Mary.

Why?

That's the way the district was formed. And Peter went to St. Mary's. Yes, I was up at the Warren Street School until I graduated - no from the 6th grade to the 7th grade at the Oliver School.

You went to the Oliver School?

Yes and I graduated from the Oliver School.

When you started school and you didn't speak English, did you find it difficult?

Well, you know how it is when you first start to speak English. So, I picked up a little English as I was growing up before I went into the first grade. So, I was doing all right in school.

Do you remember what your tenement looked like growing up? What did the house on Valley Street look like? Can you describe it? How many rooms? How did you heat it?

A wooden building. We heated it with a stove -coal stove.

Oh, coal.

Coal, at that time. We didn't have any gas. The only gas we had was the mantle. You know when you turn the gas on and it lights the mantle. But, we didn't have any electricity at that time. All we had was gas. We grew up with gas and when we got coal, the coal company was right next door to us -Cronin Coal Company. All they had to do was just come around and go into the shoot right into the cellar -the coal.

Who brought it up?

I did.

You were the oldest.

My father did. We all did. We'd go down to the cellar with a pail, bring it up. Then later on, it was converted into oil. The time that we converted into oil was when we moved to Concord Street. We all had coal on Valley Street - wood and coal.

Did your mother make her own bread or did you...?

Yes, she made her own bread. And, she would go to your father's store. She'd buy a piece of lamb and she'd make six or seven different kinds of things from the lamb alone.

.....

Oh. What did her father trade? He was a peddler or what?

A peddler trade. He traded sheep, horses, and so forth. A trader. He'd go from village to village with what he could get. You know. Like he would trade a sheep for some vegetables or something else. And, she'd take care of the money. Sometimes he would sell and she would take care of the money. She would count. She'd go. She was a very smart woman.

While you children were growing up, she would work in the mills, come home and do all the cooking?
Yes, right.

Did your father ever help around the house?

Oh, he'd help her. Oh, yea.

Who was the boss of the house?

She was. Just like Vicki is.

But not in your family?

No. My father used to get mad and so forth, you know. Once, he got very mad. He came up to my mother and we stepped in between. And I told him, "Don't you lay a hand ... You lay a hand on my mother and beware." George, too. We talked to him in a nice way and so forth and my mother said, "Don't talk that way to your father."

I know. She defended him.

Yes. She defended him more than she defended us. But, anyway, my father was really strict but not as strict as his brothers were. But he was strict with us and so forth.

Did you have many friends when you were growing up?

Oh, we had a lot of friends. I just recently lost my friend a couple of days ago.

What did your mom and dad do for recreation on weekends?

Oh, we'd go for a picnic. We'd have a picnic.

Where would you go?

We'd go to South Lawrence, you know, where the Allicon Pool is.

How did you get there from Valley Street?

Walk.

You'd walk?

Sure.

What would you take with you for a picnic, do you remember?

We'd have a basket. We'd have a lunch in there- sandwiches and so forth. And sometimes we'd go to Pleasant Valley...

.....

And, you would walk?

We'd walk from here to Pleasant Valley.

Oh, my God. From Valley Street to Methuen, Pleasant Valley.

Yes, Marie Street. And we'd have a picnic at their house and her daughter, Stella, used to teach Sunday school - Saint Anthony's Sunday school. And she'd have all the Sunday school children over there playing ball and had a picnic.

Was there much socializing among the families at the church?

All the time. Not now. All the time. We'd get in - after the church, they'd gather around. They'd stay for hours outside talking and so forth. And the May Procession was really beautiful in those days. We'd have them around the church. We'd have them in the church. And during the Palm Sunday at that time, they used to have candles. You'd have the candle lit and walk around the church. And my father used to come home and he'd carry George. He used to come home with all the wax on his suit.

From the dripping candle.

From the dripping of the candle. So my mother would get the -the thing that you wrap oranges with. She'd put it right across and she'd go over it with the iron.

And the wax would come right up?

It would come right out.

.....

No. Tell me about your first job.

My first job was with the Jewish Community Center.

Oh, really? How did that happen?

We lived across from the Jewish - on Concord Street. We lived across from the Jewish Community Center.

How old were you?

15

15 -and what did you do?

And, so one of the maintenance men-I knew his son. He went to school with us.

His name was Max. So, Max came up and he said, "Tom, do you want to make a few dollars about twice a week?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Well, I want you to help me at the Center." They used to have a luncheon almost every day at the Center. Certain groups would have a luncheon. So, we'd set up the banquet tables. I helped him set up the banquet tables. And, when they were through, we'd take the banquet tables and put them away. And, I'd get three or four dollars for it.

Three or four dollars a week?

Yes.

You were still in school at the time, weren't you?

Yes. So, after that I got out of school because of the Depression, you know. I started helping out in the family. I went to work for another Jewish person in the Everett Mill in the cafeteria. A little restaurant in the Everett Mill s -and I'd come down by ... take the trolley car. I'd come down to the Mohegan Market and buy the steak. At that time you could get the steak for 15 cents a pound. He'd give me \$4.00 to buy \$4.00 worth of steak and take it back to the restaurant and help him out at the restaurant. And, I'd get \$3.00 for it.

All that money that you earned, you took it home?

Oh, I'd give it to my mother. Yes.

Did you get an allowance?

Oh, yes. Fifty cents. And at that time, my dad, when he was laid off, he'd come up to me and say, "Tom, I would like a pack of cigarettes. Can you spare the money?" I'd give him the fifty cents my mother gave me. I'd give it to him.

Oh, my goodness. There was no unemployment insurance in those days.

No. Not until Roosevelt came in.

Oh, the poor man. What mill was he laid off from, Tom?

The Wood Mill. He was working in the Washington Mill. I got a job in the Washington Mill in the combing room.

How old were you at that time?

16

16?

When you first go for a job, you have to wait outside the mill. And there was a crowd waiting to... the boss would come out and he would pick the person that he wants. If there's any work, he would come out. Certain bosses would come out from certain departments. They'd pick the men that they want to work. And, there would be hundreds of people waiting. And from the hundreds, maybe three or four would be picked. So, Joe Limonis talked to the boss for me and he came out with the boss and he picked me and he picked two others. I stayed there and then I was... when the Washington Mill shut down, they transferred me to the Wood Mill. Because the Washington Mill was the American Woolen Company also.

Oh, then they must have liked your work. You were in the combing room?

The combing room, yes. So, I worked on the third shift in the Wood Mill.

What year was that? Do you remember?

1933 -just after Roosevelt was elected. 1933 - 1934.

.....

\$15.60

Oh, that's a little more than what your mother used to make.

Well that was after Roosevelt was in and they had Social Security and so forth at that time. He closed the banks. Roosevelt closed all the banks. Some of the banks went bankrupt because they weren't insured.

Some of the people lost their money and they were paying them like six or seven cents on the dollar instead of giving them 100%. They only got six or seven cents on the dollar at that time from the banks.

But you kept working?

I kept working until I went into the Army.

When you went into the Army, what year was that?

In 1941.

You were one of the first to get drafted?

I was one of the first in Lawrence to get drafted, yes. March 7th, 1941.

March 7th, 1941. That's before Pearl Harbor.

Yes.

How come they took you so...

There was a draft.

That was the one year before they even declared war.

That's right.

Where do you spend the war years?

Well, I was in Camp Edwards for two years. And then I was shipped over to England. From England, we went into France. I stayed in England for three months going over the terrain that we thought the terrain in France; they had the same thing in England. Going over the terrain, see. And at that time, the English people - we were on the Channel, the English Channel. The Channel was just only 60 miles across to France and they only had 4 or 5 men protecting that channel during the war. Old home guard and their rifles were 1903 rifles. And they had the old machine guns. And they were guarding the base. Suppose Hitler decided to come across that channel. There was no protection. Only old home guards.

What year did you get married?

1942. August the 4th, 1942.

How did meet your wife?

How did I meet my wife? Let her tell you about it.

Vickie, were you born in Lawrence?

No, I was born in Ft. William, Ontario.

How did you find your way to Lawrence? Tell me all about it. Start at the beginning.

Well, I was born in Ontario and when my mother died, my father took me and my two brothers to Lebanon. We went to school there. We stayed 10 years in Lebanon. Then we returned to Ontario. From Ontario, we went to Detroit, Michigan. I had a brother who was working at Henry Ford's plant and the depression came at that time. Therefore, he was laid off and we had an uncle living in Lawrence and he wrote and asked us if we'd like to come. So, we did. We left Detroit and came to Lawrence.

.....

And, prior to that, my mother used to come to Lawrence to visit her mother who was living in Lawrence on Valley Street. And I had a brother born here. My brother, George, was born in Lawrence.

Well, it's very curious, Victoria, that you were born in Ontario. How did your father get way up in Canada?

Well, my father -the first trip he came, he went to Mexico. And he didn't do so well in Mexico. And he met a friend there who told him he was going to Fort William and if he would like to come. And, that is how it came about.

Then there was a sort of Lebanese community up in Ontario?

A very small community. Approximately about 10 families.

.....

Oh, you did go to Lawrence High?

For one year- the 11th grade. And then my senior year was at the Girl's High in Boston. I graduated from the Girl's High. And then I went into training at the Marlboro City Hospital. I lived in Boston for 10 years. And after that, I used to come to visit my brothers and I met my husband here, in Lawrence.

In Lawrence. Oh, so that's how you met.

And, we were married at the Holy Cross Cathedral Chapel. And then when Tom returned from the service, we came to live in Lawrence. And, that's about it.

.....

When you married each other, did you know you were related?

No. Not at all.

How did you find out?

My Uncle Albert. When my father-in-law was dying, he came and he spent some time with him and they started to reminisce. My father remembered. My Uncle Albert explained.

Is that right? Oh, that's interesting. Then you married your cousin, but you didn't know he was your cousin.

Well, not exactly. He's probably fifth.

Fifth cousin. And, he was in the service when...

Yes. When we were married, he was in the service. He had come to the Holy Cross Cathedral and we were married in the chapel.

And then, Tom, you left and you went back to Europe?

Yes, I stayed in Europe for 22 months.

And, you were left alone, Vicki?

Yes.

And, you lived with your in-laws or alone?

I stayed with my in-laws until Donna was born. And then when Donna was born, we rented a place near the Common -at the park there.

What year was your first child born?

Well, we were married in '42 and Donna was born in '43 - nine months later or ten months later.

Tom, you're a hero. I mean you have a few medals. What did you get them for?

Tell me what medals you have. Besides the Purple Heart, you have what?

I have the Purple Heart. I have the Good Conduct medal. I have a European Theatre medal. I have two Silver Stars with Battle stars on them. And, I have the Infantry Badge. And then have the medal for Expert Rifleman.

Oh, that's beautiful. I mean, you really served your country. And poor Vickie had to stay with the little baby.

Vickie served it too. I was sending her money while cutting hair in the Army. I was sending her the money that I made. To feed the children.

Vicky, how many children did you have?

I had four. I had three daughters and a son. I wouldn't go to work until they were grown up. And then instead of returning to my profession as a nurse, I applied for a job at the Internal Revenue. I preferred to work with paper as I got older than with the patients because I had lost the patience for the patients.

.....

Was Tom your very first love?

Exactly. Exactly. Yes. Because I had friends and I knew a lot of people, but not really to go out as a date. I had a different kind of life.

Being Lebanese, in America, did you feel that you were any different?

I never felt that. I never had that ethnic feeling at all in me. I felt I was a linguist.

It didn't bother me either way. I could speak with the Arabic-speaking people. I could speak with the French people that had come from France. I could speak English. So, I wasn't disturbed about . . .

.....

Your lifestyle was a great deal different than the immigrants in Lawrence.

Exactly. Exactly. I didn't have the same lifestyle, so to speak. I was a student most of my life and more or less protected, you know, in a shell, more or less. I didn't have that freedom. And I used to often wish I had a family, like a home, which I never had. I never really had a home because my last home was when my mother died. And then I was left in space for 20 or 30 years so to speak until I married- Until I married and then had my own family. And then I settled to a home life.

.....

Okay, now after the war, Tom, did you go back into the mills to your old job?

Yes.

Which mill?

I went back to the Wood Mill.

Doing what?

I worked in the combing room.

Oh, again. You stayed in the combing room.

Then my father says, "That job is not for you. You don't make enough money here. I'm going to speak to the boss. Maybe you can come into the Dye House where I work. You'll make a little more money." So, I worked on the third shift in the Wood Mill and then I got transferred to the Dye House, which I made a little bit more money to support the family.

How many children by that time did you have?

Two.

You had two by that time.

No. I had three by that time.

Oh, three little girls. How much did you make a week? When was that? 1947 or so?

1947. In 1946, Christine was born. In 1947, yes, I was working at the Wood Mill. I was making \$30 to \$40 a week. And in the Dye House, I was making \$52 or \$53 a week.

Was that good money?

Oh, yeah. Then the boss came up to the Dye House. I was working on the spool dye where they're dyeing spool - the yarn - and then they put me on piece dye, where they're dyeing the cloth. And then I was working there for so long that the boss came up to me and says, "Tom, you don't belong here. Come with me." He put me in the office. So, I was working in the office and I got a little bit more money then- \$72. And every Thursday, my wife would meet me at the corner at the Common and I would give her my pay and we'd go shopping at Little Italy.

Where was that - Little Italy?

On Common Street.

.....

Like, what would you buy?

I'll tell you what we bought. We bought liver every Thursday - pay day. We bought liver. Vegetables, fruit. And bacon. That was a must every Thursday and the fresh vegetables and fruit.

They had them all on the sidewalk.

All on the sidewalk. And then we had the baby in the carriage. We put all the groceries on top of the baby and we wheeled her home from The Common to South Lawrence.

Did you have a car? How did you get around in the city?

Walked.

With the carriage, we walked.

We all walked. We're still walking.

PHUOC NGUYEN

Mary Armitage interviewed Phuoc Nguyen on July 20, 1996. He was born in Vietnam and immigrated to United States in 1984. He shares his memories of life on his parents' farm, his entrance to the temple to practice Buddhism and his necessary escape from his native country.

The first thing I would like for you to do is to say your name for me so that I get the correct pronunciation.

My name Fook Win (typed phonetically), that is my full name. Phuoc Nguyen.

And I would also like to know where you were born?

Yes, ma'm. I was born in Vietnam, in South Vietnam, Saigon.

Okay. And what is the date of your birth?

February 28, 1950.

And I know that Saigon is a big city, but I don't know enough about it. You will have to tell me where your family lived. Were you city people or country people?

We are really countryside people; my family lived far away from Saigon city, about 120 miles south of Vietnam.

Was that still considered part of Saigon?

Yes.

Okay.

South of Saigon, yes, Vietnam.

All right. And what kind of work did they do, your parents?

My parents work, you know, have the rice field and one hand look like, we build, foundation store and build bridge and something about cement and we lift.

I want to be sure I understand that.

And, you know, look cement block, we build a house and glass, we do the window and everything before 1975.

Okay. Then you were builders in construction?

Yes . No, not construction, just you know, just the sales.

.....

Okay. Then your parents worked in rice fields, and did you also?

Yes, you know, before 1975, I worked, you know, the helper in my family, but, you know, actually my mother took care of the business and my father, he was practicing Buddhism in the temple, and me too. Yes, so, you know, I live in the temple from I was about 14 years old until 25.

Then, when you were 14....

Yes, I go into the temple with my father. But, you know, Hoa-Hao Temple [is] different from the Buddhist Temple, you know, regularly you know about that, but, you know, Hoa-Hao, this mean one part of the Buddhism.

All right. Now, we're going to explain this as well as we can.

Hoa-Hao, you know one part of the Buddhism. It is my master, he founded it, you know Hoa-Hao...

Did you just say his name?

Yeah, Win Foo So.

.....

All right. When someone founds a branch of Buddhism, how does that happen? Does he believe something differently?

No. Exactly in the way of the Buddha teaching but, you know, different from the, you know, the temple. You know about the temple? So far, you know, because originally about the Buddhism, we don't have long belt. Then you know about that?

I'm thinking of questions right now to ask you. You said to me, "You know about temple." And I said, "Yes." I know that there is such a thing as a Buddhist Temple, and that's about all I know. So, describe to me what the temple is used for.

Yes, you know, the temple used for the monk who, you know, who get out really, completely get out of the home, they don't, you know, society with, you know the society, just practicing to be the Buddhist, you know what I mean?

Yes, I do.

They want to be enlightened.

Enlightened. Ah, okay.

So, you know, so far you just see in the movie and you see in the television about the temple. Yeah, then they have the gong and the bell, But, you know, Hoa-Hao Buddhism different from that. We just learn from the book, then we practice inside our soul, you know, inside our spirit, because, you know, the Buddhists, the Buddha he the teacher, he no teach the people how to concentrate your mind, right? How to, you know, cultivate your inside, your body, not about everything else. So, you know, you save your hat, you wear your yellow clothes, it doesn't help you about inside, you know, what I mean?

Yes, I do. All right, then you're really nourishing your soul?

Yes, and we try to, you know, meditate, meditation, like that.

About how long everyday do you spend practicing your faith?

Yeah, you know, the basic at my house, I have to prayer to the altar about twice a day.

About what time in the morning?

Depend on you, if you have free time and you can do it about six o'clock or five o'clock .

And about how much time in the morning?

It take about a half hour.

A half an hour?

And the evening, a half hour.

When you pray that way and, in the Buddhist way, are you communicating with God, is Buddha God?
No, actually, you know, that is the first step for the union, for the beginning, that is look like that is the roof, it remind you how to remember about your duty everyday, and what are you doing, what are you, you know, thinking, correct way.

Now, tell me a little bit more about your Master. Is he alive now?

No. We, you know, he miss up there on 1946 when the Communists, you know, they caught him. So, from that time, he disappear. But, you know, nobody can found his body. But, you know, about in my religion, I believe he is still alive somewhere else. Yeah, because before this happen, then he write ... a poem, and he leave for us before he, before something happen.

Oh, he wrote a poem?

Yeah, for us, before this happen. Then he, inside the poem, you know, he said he had to go somewhere else for awhile. What he did judge, we had to do, some other day he will be back.

Then, has anyone taken his place or?

No.

No?

Until now, you know.

We'll continue with talking about your schooling in Vietnam.

Yeah. Actually, you know, in Vietnam, I just study into Level Six, sixth grade. Then, because that time, my parent, my father, then he put me in the temple to practice about the Buddhism.

.....

About 1970. Now these were the war years?

Yes. Then I get to know, but, you know, by this time, you know, I work in my Hoa-Hao Buddhism, look like Salvation Army around here, because we help the poor people that need us, the people in the battlefield and something like that.

When you helped people who had been in the battlefields, how did you help them?

How, because, you know, in my religion, we had a fund, we collect donation from all people. But did not belong to any part of the government, just for my religion and my...

And so, you could use those funds to help people who needed help?

Yes. And by that time, you know, I just hear from the government for, you know, the look like need for obligation military. So, I worked for that for couple years.

Is that because you were in the Buddhist Temple?

Yeah, look like monastery.

So, when did you come out of the temple?

Until '75, is when the North Communists took over the South, yeah, then they closed the temple.

Tell me this. When they shut down the Buddhist Temples, did they also shut down every other religious group, too?

No, because of the Catholic they handle, you know, the worldwide system. Right? You know, the Buddhism, they have the worldwide, but, you know, only part of the Buddhism, this means Hoa-Hao

Buddhism just in the South Vietnam. My master, Win Foo So, then he found it in 1939. Just, you know, so, you know, he has about three million follower.

Is that so? That would be worldwide?

No, just one part of my country. So, you know, by now about outside my country, nobody know about this, nobody know this happen to my religion.

So, they could shut your religion down because there wouldn't be an international outcry. If they had tried to shut down, say the Catholics, it would be known all over the world?

Yes.

Very interesting. Would they have had any particular reason for wanting to shut down the Hoa-Hao (pronounced wah-how)? Did the Communists have any particular grudge against the Hoa-Hao Buddhists, or did they just pick them as?

Yeah, you know, actually, my Master, when he found it, Hoa-Hao Buddhism, by that time, you know, the French took over my country. So, he not only the one who practiced Buddhism, he also, you know, look like the man who revolution to take my country over from the French. Ya, so, you know, by that time in my country, they had a Communists against French, Hoa-Hao Buddhism against French, so Communists, they want to be, you know, unique under him to against French. So, they fight any way to shut down, you know, look like they ambushed the other, patriots.

Oh, patriots. Okay.

Because, you know, Ho Chi Men he want to, you know, priority in the way to take over the country by himself. So, you know, and the patriots he kill, he do anything.

So he considered the Hoa-Hao Buddhists as patriots.

Yeah.

Okay, I've got it now. All right, so you've been asked to leave the temple. What did you do then?

So, I go back home. Then I did work on the rice fields for survival. Then, you know, they take in my family I was has about five acre of rice field. Then after '75 they took over, just left for me about two, left for me not enough, looked like two of ten acre, just very small, so, you know, we just survival.

Barely survived. And, how many people were you supporting with those two acres that were left?

In my family, my parents and my four brothers and sister, this means six people.

Now, how long, until what year did you work then in the rice field and, I'm not sure that I remember this correctly, but working in rice fields then, you were actually, were they controlled by the Communist government?

Yes.

Yes, completely, so, in a way, your family lost what it had and...

Yes.

All right. So, how long did that go on?

It take, so, you know, about I told you about my family, we had about construction store, selling?

Yes.

Then, we close, too, because they forfeit.

And, how about your home?

We still had a home.

You still had a home?

Yes. Then, you know, after my father and I left the temple and go back to help my family by the working on the rice field and I knew, you know, looked like black market, then we working on black market and disabling everything. But, you know, my father, he go somewhere, he go anywhere to, you know, preaching the Buddhism.

All right. That's interesting. So, he kept preaching Buddhism?

Yes, then he was, you know, in prison for about seven times.

Because he was preaching Buddhism?

Yes, about seven times, then I was two times in prison, and the last time, about in '78, so when I escaped the prison, you know, I left my family. So, you know, I lived nowhere.

Why did they put you in prison?

Because, you know, my family, we are very strong in the Hoa-Hao Buddhism.

So, you know, because in the Communist consider we are, you know, the patriots against them.

All right. So, when you said you escaped from prison, I want to cover two things here, your father was in prison many times. Did he escape each time or was he released?

No, they release because they don't want him to preaching in outside when he get into the prison, then he preaching Buddhism inside the, because they think they keep him any reason for why they release him, then he go the other place. Then they ask him where he labor, were did he permit something like that, they put him in the jail again.

.....

All right, so then my question was going to be to tell me about how you escaped, what made you think "I must escape"?

Because, you know, when, just right after the '75 on 30 of April, '75, the Communists took over. But, you know, in my village, they haven't taken over yet, so, you know. ..

Excuse me, what village is that? Did that village have a name?

Vancong.

Okay, under the communist regime. Okay, I've got it, thank you.

So, you know, we have some, the military, they want to go into the jungle and against the Communist against. . .so, you know, I help them to bring the ammunition and the cannon or something, and whatever the military used, then we carry and go to the board, then they go away. So, when they took over for awhile, then they heard the people all say about me. They put me in the jail for one time, about two week, then they ask me and I say, "No, I didn't do anything" and they release. Then, the second time, I and my friend, we have some other action against, look like the mayor in the city, something like that, in my country, then, they know about that. Then, you know, they put me in the jail again. Then, just look like province, so, you know, the prison very simple. So, by the way, I think this one very serious, not easy, so I find out a way to escape.

So, I live in the bottom south of my country. So, after I left I go to Saigon. I left because, you know, very mixed feeling nobody knows who you are, for awhile until 1982, I escape from Vietnam to Philippines.

Okay, then your route was not the route say, of some Cambodians, who went to Thailand or in a refugee camp. You just left and escaped?

Yes, escaped by boat, by small boat, it take me about 14 days on the sea.

How many were in the boat?

Seventy-two people. But, you know, when we landed on Philippines, they were 54, this mean 18 die on the sea without food, without water for 14 days. I was about 32, 31 when I left Vietnam, 1982

Who was it hardest on, women and children when they tried to escape in the boats?

Yes, you know, by that time, most of the men escaped, beside that, some people if they had money or if they had the easy way to escape, they bring their family, wife, children, something like that.

All right. You lived in a refugee camp and that would be in the Philippines?

Yes.

Okay. Tell me a little bit about that. I know that some people were just there, they would try to go to school to learn about the culture of whatever country they were going to go to next. Did you know at this time, what country you wanted to go to next?

No, because someone who can go to the USA, at least they had to work for the government before, they had to be the soldier, before 1975. The second one from people who work for American company, American military, something like that. And the third, someone who had relatives in the United States. So, you can go to the USA. But, you know, about myself I was in a military in the Vietnam government. I didn't work for the American, I don't have any relatives in the USA so I escaped from my country because I cannot live with that, because I live with them and I fear, I [was] scared every night, every moment, when I see, you know, the police. . . I [was] scared, then I run away.

Tell me this. You were the only one in your family at this point who left?

Yes, escape, yes, right.

All right, now the rest of your family is back...?

Yes. My wife, my two children they in there now. ... I marry on August, 1975. This mean after the Communists took over my country about couple of months. Then after that, I had two children. Then when I left Vietnam and my wife and two children stayed with my parents.

All right, now those two children, their names are what?

Wen Lok, right now he live here with me. Then the other name is Tri. He still in Vietnam.

All right, then Lok eventually came to this country?

Yes. Then Lok and my youngest brother, they escape from Vietnam on 1989. They came to Malaysia and they lived there for one year. Then after that, I sponsor them to live here with me. Then the other son, Tri, then my wife, my ex wife, she keep him in Vietnam because when I left Vietnam for a couple of years, my wife, she remarried.

Yes. So he is in Vietnam with your former wife. All right. Lok is here with you and....

Shofa is the daughter of my second wife.

All right, so now, let's see, we have you in the Philippines and you haven't really decided what country you want to go to. So, I would like to know how you decide what country to go to?

So, you know, at first, I just apply for resettlement in French because I have some friend who live with me when, by the time I was in the temple. And he, you know, he look like activist against the Communist and French. So, I asked to go to France. But, you know, I wait for a couple of months, they refuse me. Then I just stay there, you know, no country accepted me. Then, after all, you know, I have some relatives in Australia, so I have them to sponsor for me. And, you know, about 18 months I was in the camp so, after all, I had the name on the list of Australia. Yes. Then the friend, the other list from the American, I had that list, too. But, you know, very surprise for me, I did not fill any form to America. But, you know, the first I went the ambassador. He asked me: "You wait, that's how you wait here enough? Now you

want to go to America?" I said, "Yes, if you allow me, I go." Yes. So, you know, he didn't ask me any about my background military or something like that because I didn't have. He kept asking me about the Hoa-Hao Buddhism.

Is that so? Now this is the American ambassador?
Yes.

And where was he, in the Philippines? Visiting?
Yes, he's real American, but he goes to Philippines, then he interviews the people in the camp.

How did he happen to talk to you?

Yes. You know about the ambassador, you know they just interview the special case about military that has a problem or they have a secret mission, or whatever, you know. But, you know, the regular people just for the delegation they call JVA, I don't know what the mix up about that, I don't know what about... Yes. JVA. They just interviewed the regular case who was in the military, who had work for American, who had the relative, so, you know, they consider all, all right, they go. But, you know, the ambassador just only special case about the military problem or secret mission or whatever. But, you know, very surprise for me that he call me [for an] interview. I didn't fill any form to, you know, to ask for it,in the USA. Then, you know, the first question he ask me "You wait here enough?" Then, after all he asked me [to] tell [him] about the Hoa-Hao because, you know, when everybody get into the camp, you had to fill out, you know, your background, whatever.

That's kind of interesting, isn't it? I wonder. Do you remember his name, the ambassador?
No, I don't know.

I mean, you just wonder if he had some special interest, maybe in Buddhism or just what it might have been that made...

I, so, you know, I think maybe he was in Vietnam, then he know exactly what happen in Vietnam, and, you know, what village, where the location, whatever, he know exactly.

I think you're probably right. He probably was better educated about what really happened then...

Then, he asked me, you know, lots of things. If I failed one question, you know, maybe I fail [and] I cannot get into United States.

So, with an ambassador being interested in your going to the United States, you made the decision to go there?

Yes. But, you know, very special he interviewed me at early morning, at the morning, then, the second time at afternoon, he call me again, then he say "Go back to the office and swear to go to United States." For one day only. So, the people in the camp, you know, after interview, I get back into the camp, then they ask "What are you doing, what was you doing in Vietnam, you had a secret mission, you are FBI or you are, or whatever, why you didn't tell us?" I say, "No, I didn't do anything, I am a civilian."

I would have been saying the same thing, you were getting special treatment. So, your total time in the Philippines was how long?
About 26 months.

Okay. I just want to stay there for a minute. I know we're heading for the United States, but, while you were there, other than filling out the usual forms and what-not, how did you occupy your time during the day? That must have been a difficult time.

A lot of things. But, you know, one thing I really regret is I didn't study English. Not enough time, because I was the group leader of the Youth Buddhism, the group of the Youth Family Buddhism, you

know. And then I the head of, you know, society, the head of the social office in the camp. And then, for awhile I teaching mechanic, for the people who want to know about the mechanic or something like that. So, you know, that take all of my time so I don't have much time to study English.

So, how does the ambassador decide you would get to the United States? Did he fly you?

Yes. Then he transfers me to the other camp in Philippines.

There were two camps in the Philippines? All right, I'm learning something now. I've always known there was one; I didn't know there were two.

So, you know, the first camp, the people can go any country, they keep there. But, you know, the second camp for people only to go to the America so, you know, stay there for six months. So, they teach you, they call 'orientation'. They teach you about the culture in American, English, whatever. So I stay there about six months, and I study English there [for] six months. Because I have interviewed a lady from Burma whose mother happened to be an English teacher so, when she got to the camp, she became an English teacher. She helped people learn English.

.....

Yes. I come in the United States by, you know, the Lutheran Association. His name was Jim Anderson. He just practice pastor and he sponsor me. Then I and him we live inside of church. They had a two room in the church.... St. Paul, Minneapolis. Yes, I lived there for two months.

But I really worry about my family; I want to make money right away. So, then he sponsor me there. We didn't ask for the work there, I didn't ask just for the medical only. So, you know, I studied and then I work part-time on Saturday.

What did you do?

Mechanic. I go to help the garage, then they paid me cash forty dollar a day. Then, just, you know, just in couple week from the welfare office, they send me a form and they ask me about income, something like that, because they give you Medicare, so they ask you about income. So, you know, my sponsor tell me fill out your income, \$40. I say, no, don't do that. Because if cash, not a check, then we see all the fun we have -is a lot of problem. You know, I had to learn about that, I had to know about that, but you know, my sponsor he fill out the form, then he send to the welfare. And after that though, welfare send a letter to the garage where I work, and then ask them about whatever. Then you know, the garage-man-owner, then he told me, I just help you a little bit because you are very hardship. I help you to work for \$40 in cash for a weekend, but for now they tell me, you know, fill out a form, so after the year, I had to fill out income tax. Very complicate. So, you stop working. That really disappointed me. But you know, that time I was about 33 years old. But you know, my sponsor, he just gives me about five dollars a week during the day I go to school. How can I spend for myself? Then you know, I take five dollar from my sponsor, I feel very guilty about that, very ashamed about that, you know. I want to work, to make money. And the family, my parents, my wife, my sons. So I cannot work over there and stay over there. But you know, I really regret I had to leave there. I left. So you know, I have the friend who was in my homeland in my hometown. He lived around here then. So I call them and they send me airplane ticket. I fly in here and so I live here from there to now.

All right. Now, the friend that you knew in your hometown, he was in this area?

Yes

Is that so? Right in Lawrence?

Yes, right in Lawrence. He come here from 1975.

All right. So, we're up to what year , you just told me and I've forgotten?

December, '84, I come here.

What were your first impressions of Lawrence? What did you think?

Look like no choice, and you know, I know nowhere else, that I had to live there. So, you know, when I come here, then I applied for work there. By the time I go to school.

Where did you go to school?

They had, you know, they call "BLP", this mean "Bi-Lingual Program" in Lawrence Library. Then, I studied there about, just about one month, and then I find a job. So, you know, this mean, you know, I took one check from Welfare only. Then I had a job in MODICON, I start to work there. I work in daytime, so I go back to school night-time, part-time. So, I work there about eight month, so I ask them to change me to the second shift. I go back to school in daytime for full-time.

And what are you studying now, still English?

Yes. Just English.

Okay. You do very well with English.

But, you know, just , after all, you know, I study English about one year only because when I transferred to work, the second shift, I go to full-time school just about six months, or so, you know, I got laid off from the MODICON, so I try the other job daytime, so I stop going to school again. So, on and off, on and off, you know, totally about one year in school.

Where were you living in Lawrence at that time?

In Cross Street in Lawrence, near the St. Mary Church. I lived there about five years, then I move up to Tower Hill, one year, then after that I bought this house for five years.

And your parents, they probably wanted to stay there?

Yes, they want to stay there, they don't want to come here.

Now when you think about Vietnam, do you still think of it, as home?

Yes. You know, I just tell you the truth. I live here, right? Yes. Then, you know, I cooperate everything about for this city where I lived, then, you know, I have the people, I do everything. But, you know, about my mind, I think some other day, I go back to my country.

It would be nice.

Yes. It would be better, even though in my country very poor. I don't have car in my country. But, you know, about a sensitive, about your mental, about your emotional...

You could say, if it weren't for the political situation there, you probably never would have left? You would just have lived your life out as a Vietnamese and been probably very happy. But you have to do these things, I guess.

So, you know, for example, I try here. So, you know, in Lawrence again, they say that the Lawrence very worse right now. My wife, she thinking about to buy the house in Methuen, or in Andover, or North Andover, something like that. So, you know, but I think the first step I came to Lawrence from the Lawrence, they help me up right now. So, you know, I think anyway I should live in Lawrence. The negro they come, they live, I can live, what matter.

Tell me, how did you decide to become a mailman?

Because, you know, when I was in Bi-Lingual Program, just after nine months I come into you know the ... so, you know, one person from the unemployment office, they come into the class. They ask who want to take a test in the post office. They came to class and ask who want to take a test in the post office. So, one of the question, the people ask, how about citizen? They say, no need a citizen. I say okay then, I fill out the form right away. So, you know, I fill out the form. Nine month later, they call me for the test.

What year was this?

About '86, '87, something like that.

Okay. So you've been a postal worker for maybe ten years?

Yes. No more than eight years. I start to work on 1988.

What is your route, where do you...

86, my route 86 right now, around Wetherbee School.

And you know the neighborhood well?

Yes.